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VOL. 2795.

THE STORY OF FRANCIS CLUDDE.

BY

STANLEY J. WEYMAN.

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. 2.

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VOL. II.

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OF
FRANCIS CLUDDE.

BY
STANLEY J. WEYMAN,
AUTHOR OF "THE HOUSE OF THE WOLF," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1891.



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THE STORY OF FRANCIS CLUDDE.

CHAPTER I.

AT BAY IN THE GATEHOUSE.

WHAT was to be done? That was the question, and a terrible question it was. Behind us we had the inhospitable country, dark and dreary, the night wind sweeping over it. In front, where the lights twinkled and the smoke of the town went up, we were like to meet with a savage reception. And it was no time for weighing alternatives. The choice had to be made in a moment; I marvel to this day at the quickness with which I made it, for good or ill.

"We must get into the town!" I cried imperatively. "And before the alarm is given. It is hopeless to fly, Master Bertie, and we cannot spend another night in the fields. Quick, madam!"

I continued to the Duchess as she came up—I did not wait to hear her husband's opinion, for I saw he was stunned by the catastrophe. "We have hurt one of the town-guard through a mistake. We must get through the gates before it is discovered!"

I seized her rein and flogged up her horse, and gave her no time to ask questions, but urged on the party at a hard gallop until the gate was reached. The attempt, I knew, was desperate, for the two men who had escaped had ridden straight for the town, and must have entered; but I saw no other resource, and it seemed to me to be better to surrender peaceably, if that were possible, than to expose the women to another night of such cold and hunger as the last. Fortune so far favoured us that when we reached the gate it was open. Probably, the patrol had ridden straight through to get help, and no one else had thought fit to close it; and, no one withstanding us, we spurred our sobbing horses under the archway and entered the street.

It was a curious entry, and a curious scene we came upon. I remember now how strange it all looked. The houses leaning forward in a dozen quaint forms, clear cut against the pale evening sky, caused a darkness as of a cavern in

the narrow street below. Here and there in the midst of this darkness hung a lanthorn, which, making the gloom away from it seem deeper, lit up the things about it, throwing into flaring prominence some barred window with a scared face peering from it, some corner with a puddle, a slinking dog, a broken flight of steps. Just within the gates stood a brazier full of glowing coal, and beside it a halberd rested against the wall. I divined that the watchman had run into the town with the riders, and I drew rein in doubt, listening and looking. I think if we had ridden straight on then, all might have been well; or, at least, we might have been allowed to give ourselves up in a decent fashion.

But we hesitated a moment, and were lost. No doubt, though we saw but one, there were a score of people watching us, who took us for four men, Master Bertie and I being in front; and these, judging from the boldness of our entry that there were more behind, concluded that this was a foray upon the town. At any rate, they took instant advantage of our pause. With a swift whirr an iron pot came hurtling past me, and, missing the Duchess by a hand's-breadth, went clanking under the gate-house. That served for a signal. In a moment an alarm of hostile cries

rose all round us. An arrow whizzed between my horse's feet. Half a dozen odd missiles, snatched up by hasty hands, came raining in on us out of the gloom. The town seemed to be rising as one man. A bell began to ring, and a hundred yards in front, where the street branched off to right and left, the way seemed suddenly alive from wall to wall with lights and voices and brandished arms, the gleam of steel, and the babel of a furious crowd—a crowd making down towards us with a purpose we needed no German to interpret.

It was a horrible moment; the more horrible that I had not expected this fury, and was unnerved as well as taken aback by it. Remembering that I had brought my companions here, and that two were women, one was a child, I quailed. There was no mistaking the stern meaning of those cries, the menace of that rage so much surpassing anything I had feared. Though I did not know that the man we had struck down was a bridegroom of a week, and that there were those in the crowd in whose ears the young wife's piercing scream still rang, I yet quailed before their yells and curses.

I think it was instinct—the instinct of the hunted animal which saved us. As I glanced

round for a place of refuge, my eyes lit on an open doorway close to me, and close also to the brazier and halberd. It was a low stone doorway, beetle-browed, with a coat-of-arms carved over it. I saw in an instant that it must lead to the tower above us—the gatehouse; and I sprang from my horse, a fresh yell from the houses hailing the act. If we were to gain a moment for parleying, we must take refuge there. I do not know now how I did it, but somehow I made myself understood by the others, and got the women off their horses, and dragged Mistress Anne inside, where at once we both fell in the darkness over the lower steps of a spiral staircase. This hindered the Duchess, who was following, and I heard a scuffle taking place behind us. But in that confined space—the staircase was very narrow—I could give no help. I could only stumble upwards, dragging the fainting girl after me, until we emerged through an open doorway at the top into a room. What kind of room I did not notice then, only that it was empty. Notice! It was no time for taking notice. The bell was clanging loudly and more loudly outside. The mob were yelling like hounds in sight of their quarry. The shouts, the confused cries, and threats, and questions, which entered through the open window,

deafened me. I turned to learn what was happening behind me. The other two had not come up.

I felt my way down again, one hand on the central pillar, my shoulder against the outside wall. The stair-foot was faintly lit by the glow from outside, and on the bottom step I came on someone, hurt or dead, just a dark mass at my feet. It was Master Bertie. I gave a cry and leaped over his body. The Duchess, brave wife, was standing before him, the halberd, which she had snatched up, presented at the doorway and the howling mob outside.

Fortunately the crowd had not yet learned how few we were; nor saw, I think, that it was but a woman who confronted them. To rush into the low doorway and storm the narrow winding staircase in the face of unknown numbers was a task from which the bravest veterans might have flinched, and the townsfolk, furious as they were, hung back. I took advantage of the pause. I grasped the halberd myself, and pushed the Duchess back. "Drag him up!" I muttered. "If you cannot manage it, call Anne!"

But grief and hard necessity gave her strength, and, despite the noise in front of me, I heard her toil panting upwards with her burden. When I

judged she had reached the room above, I too turned and ran up after her, posting myself in the last angle just below the room. There I was sheltered from missiles by the turn in the staircase, and was further protected by the darkness. Now I could hold the way with little risk, for only one could come up at a time, and he would be a brave man who should storm the stairs in my teeth.

All this, be it understood, was done in a kind of desperate frenzy, in haste and confusion, with no plan or final purpose, but simply out of the instinct of self-preservation, which led me to do from moment to moment what I could to save our lives. I did not know whether there was another staircase to the tower, nor whether there were enemies above us; whether, indeed, enemies might not swarm in on us from a dozen entrances. I had no time to think of more than just this: that my staircase, of which I did know, must be held.

I think I had stood there about a minute, breathing hard and listening to the din outside, which came to my ears a little softened by the thick walls round me—so much softened at least that I could hear my heart beating in the midst of it—when the Duchess came back to the door

above. I could see her, there being a certain amount of light in the room behind her, but she could not see me.

"What can I do?" she asked softly.

I answered by a question. "Is he alive?" I muttered.

"Yes; but hurt," she answered, struggling with a sob—with a fluttering of a woman's heart she had repressed so bravely. "Much hurt, I fear! Oh why, why did we come here?"

She did not mean it as a reproach, but I took it as one, and braced myself more firmly to meet this crisis—to save her at least if it should be any way possible. When she asked again "Can I do anything?" I bade her take my pike and stand where I was for a moment. Since no enemy had yet made his appearance above, the strength of our position seemed to hold out some hope, and it was the more essential that I should understand it, and know exactly what our chances were.

I sprang up the stairs into the room and looked round, my eyes seeming to take in everything at once. It was a big bare room, with signs of habitation only in one corner. On the side towards the town was a long, low window, through which—a score of the diamond panes were broken already—the flare of the besiegers' torches fell

luridly on the walls and vaulted roof. By the dull embers of a wood fire, over which hung a huge black pot, Master Bertie was lying on the boards, breathing loudly and painfully, his head pillowed on the Duchess's kerchief. Beside him sat Mistress Anne, her face hidden, the child wailing in her lap. A glance round assured me that there was no other staircase, and that on the side towards the country the wall was pierced with no window bigger than a loop-hole or an arrow-slit; with no opening through which even a boy could enter. For the present, therefore, unless the top of the tower should be escaladed from the adjacent houses—and I could do nothing to provide against that—we had nothing to fear except from the staircase and the window I have mentioned. Every moment, however, a missile or a shot crashed through the latter, adding the shiver of falling glass to the general din. No wonder the child wailed and the girl sank over it in abject terror. Those savage yells might well make a woman blench. They carried more fear and dread to my heart than did the real danger of our position, desperate as it was.

And yet it was so desperate that for a moment I leant against the wall dazed and hopeless, listening to the infernal tumult without and within.

Had Bertie been by my side to share the responsibility and join in the risk, I could have borne it better. I might have felt then some of the joy of battle, and the stern pleasure of the one matched against the many. But I was alone. How was I to save these women and that poor child from the yelling crew outside? How indeed? I did not know the enemy's language; I could not communicate with him, could not explain, could not even cry for quarter for the women.

A stone which glanced from one of the mulions and grazed my shoulder roused me from this fit of cowardice, which I trust and believe had lasted for a few seconds only. At the same moment an unusual volley of missiles tore through the window as if discharged at a given signal. We were under cover, and they did us no harm, rolling for the most part noisily about the floor. But when the storm ceased, and a calm as sudden followed, I heard a dull, regular sound close to the window—a thud! thud! thud!—and on the instant divined the plan and the danger. My courage came back, and with it my wits. I remembered an old tale I had heard, and, dropping my sword where I stood, I flew to the hearth, and unhooked the great pot. It was heavy: half-full of something, broth most likely; but I recked

nothing of that; I bore it swiftly to the window, and just as the foremost man on the ladder had driven in the lead-work before him with his axe, flung the whole of the contents—they were not scalding, but they were very hot—in his face. The fellow shrieked loudly; and blinded and taken by surprise, lost his hold and fell against his supporter, and both tumbled down again more quickly than they had come up.

Sternly triumphant, I poised the great pot itself in my hands, thinking to fling it down upon the sea of savage upturned faces of which I had a brief view as the torches flared now on one, now on another. But prudence prevailed. If no more blood were shed, it might still be possible to get some terms. I laid the pot down by the side of the window as a weapon to be used only in the last resort.

Meanwhile the Duchess, posted in the dark, had heard the noise of the window being driven in, and cried out pitifully to know what it was. "Stand firm!" I shouted loudly. "Stand firm. We are safe as yet."

Even the uproar without seemed to abate a little as the first fury of the mob died down. Probably their leaders were concerting fresh action. I went and knelt beside Master Bertie, and made

a rough examination of his wound. He had received a nasty blow on the back of the head, from which the blood was still oozing, and he was insensible. His face looked very long and thin and death-like. But, so far as I could ascertain, the bones were uninjured, and he was now breathing more quietly. "I think he will recover," I said, easing his clothes.

Anne was crouching on the other side of him. As she did not answer I looked up at her. Her lips were moving, but the only word I caught was "Clarence!" I thought her distraught, and did not wonder; for I had work enough to keep my own wits. But I wanted her help, and I repeated loudly, "Anne! Anne!" trying to rouse her.

She looked past me, shuddering. "Heaven forgive you!" she muttered. "You have brought me to this! And now I must die! I must die here! In the net they have set for others is their own foot taken!"

She kept on muttering in this way, and seemed quite beside herself with terror. I saw that she was not addressing me; and I had not time to make sense of her wanderings. I left her and went out to speak to the Duchess. Poor woman! even her brave spirit was giving way. I felt her cold hands tremble as I took the halberd from

her. "Go into the room awhile," I said softly. "He is not seriously hurt, I am sure. I will guard this. If anyone appears at the window, scream."

She went gladly, and I took her place, having now to do double duty. I had been there a few minutes only, listening with my soul in my ears to detect the first signs of attack, either below me or in the room behind, when I distinguished a strange rustling sound on the staircase. It appeared to come from a point a good deal below me, and, probably, whoever made it was just within the doorway. I peered into the gloom but could see no one as yet. "Stand!" I cried in a tone of warning. "Who is that?"

The sound ceased abruptly, but it left me uneasy. Could they be going to blow us up with gunpowder? No! I did not think so. They would not care to ruin the gateway for the sake of capturing so small a party. And the tower was strong. It would not be easy to blow it up.

Yet in a short time the noise began again; and my fears returned with it. "Stand!" I cried savagely, "or take care of yourselves!"

The answer was a flash of bright light—which for a second showed the rough stone walls winding away at my feet—a stunning report, and the pattering down of half a dozen slugs from the

roof. I laughed, my first start over. "You will have to come a little higher up!" I cried tauntingly, as I smelt the fumes. My eyes had become so accustomed to the darkness that I felt sure I could detect an assailant, however warily he might make his approach. And my halberd was seven feet long, so that I could reach as far as I could see. I had had time, too, to grow cool.

After this there was comparative quiet for another space. Every now and then a stone or, more rarely, the ball of an arquebuse would come whizzing into the room above. But I did not fear this. It was easy to keep under cover. And the shouting of the crowd no longer startled me. I began to see a glimpse of hope. It was plain that the townsfolk were puzzled how to come at us without suffering great loss. They were unaware of our numbers, and, as it proved, believed that we had three uninjured men at least. The staircase was impracticable as a point of assault, and the window, being only three feet in height and twenty from the ground, was not much better, if defended, as they expected it would be, by a couple of desperate swordsmen.

I was not much astonished, therefore, when the rustling sound, beginning again at the foot of the staircase, came this time to no more formid-

able issue than a hail in Spanish. "Will you surrender?" the envoy cried, keeping well out of sight.

"No!" I said roundly.

"Who are you?" was the next question.

"We are English!" I answered.

He went then; and there for the time the negotiations ended. But, seeing the dawn of hope, I was the more afraid of any trap or surprise, and I cried to the Duchess to be on her guard. For this reason, too, the suspense of the next few minutes was almost more trying than anything which had gone before. But the minutes came at last to an end. A voice below cried loudly in English, "Holloa! are you friends?"

"Yes, yes," I replied joyfully, before the words had well ceased to rebound from the walls. For the voice and accent were Master Lindstrom's! A cry of relief from the room behind me showed that there, too, the speaker was recognised. The Duchess came running to the door, indeed; but I begged her to go back and keep a good lookout. And she obeyed.

"How come you here? How has it happened?" Master Lindstrom asked, his voice, though he still remained below, betraying his

perplexity and unhappiness. "Can I not do something? This is terrible, indeed."

"You can come up, if you like," I answered, after a moment's thought. "But you must come alone. And I cannot let even you, friend as you are, see our defences."

As he came up I stepped back and drew the door of the room towards me, so that though a little light reached the head of the stairs he could not, standing there, see into the room or discern our real weakness. I did not distrust him—Heaven forbid!—but he might have to tell all he saw to his friends below, and I thought it well, for his sake as well as our own, that he should be able to do this freely, and without hurting us. As he joined me I held up a finger for silence and listened keenly. But all was quiet below. No one had followed him. Then I turned and warmly grasped his hands, and we peered into one another's faces. I saw he was deeply moved; that he was thinking of Dymphna and how I had saved her. He held my hands as though he would never loose them.

"Well!" I said, as cheerfully as I could, "have you brought us an offer of terms? But let me tell you first," I continued, "how it happened." And I briefly explained that we had mistaken the

captain of the guard and his two followers for Clarence and the two Spaniards. "Is he dead?" I continued.

"No, he is still alive," Master Lindstrom answered gravely. "But the townsfolk are furious, and the seizure of the tower has still further exasperated them. Why did you do it?"

"Because we should have been torn to pieces if we had not done it," I answered drily. "You think we are in a strait place?"

"Do you not think so yourself?" he said, somewhat astonished.

I laughed. "That is as may be," I answered with an affectation of recklessness. "The staircase is narrow and the window low. We shall sell our lives dearly, my friend. Yet, for the sake of the women who are with us, we are willing to surrender if the citizens offer us terms. After all, it was an accident. Cannot you impress this on them?" I added eagerly.

He shook his head. "They will not hear reason," he said.

"Then," I replied, "impress the other thing upon them. Tell them that our swords are sharp and we are desperate."

"I will see what I can do," he answered slowly. "The Duke of Cleves is expected here

to-morrow, and the townsfolk feel they would be disgraced for ever if he should find their gate held by a party of marauders, as they consider you."

"The Duke of Cleves?" I repeated. "Perhaps he may be better affected towards us."

"They will overpower you before he comes," Master Lindstrom answered despondently. "I would put no trust in him if I were you. But I will go to them, and, believe me, I will do all that man can do."

"Of that I am sure," I said warmly. And then, cautioning me to remain strictly on the defensive, he left me.

Before his footsteps had ceased to echo on the stairs the door beside me opened, and Mistress Anne appeared at it. I saw at once that his familiar voice had roused her from the stupor of fear in which I had last seen her. Her eyes were bright, her whole frame was thrilling with excitement, hope, suspense. I began to understand her; to discern beneath the disguise thrown over it in ordinary times by a strong will the nervous nature which was always confident or despairing, which felt everything so keenly—everything, that is, which touched itself.

"Well?" she cried, "well?"

"Patience! patience!" I replied rather sharply. I could not help comparing her conduct with that of the Duchess, and blaming her, not for her timidity, but for the selfishness which she had betrayed in her fear. I could fancy Petronilla trembling and a coward, but not despairing nor utterly cast down, nor useless when others needed her, nor wrapped in her own terrors to the very exclusion of reason. "Patience!" I said; "he is coming back. He and his friends will do all they can for us. We must wait awhile and hope, and keep a good look-out."

She had her hand on the door, and by an abrupt movement she slipped out to me and closed it behind her. This made the staircase so dark that I could no longer distinguish her face, but I judged from her tone that her fears were regaining possession of her. "Clarence," she muttered, her voice low and trembling. "Have you thought of him? Could not he help us? He may have followed us here, and may be here now. Now, do you understand? And yet he may not know in what danger we are."

"Clarence!" I said, astonished and almost angry. "Clarence help us? Go back, girl—go back. You are mad. He would be more likely

to complete our ruin. Go in and nurse the baby!" I added bitterly.

What could she mean, I asked myself when she had gone in. Was there anything in her suggestion? Would Clarence follow us hither? If so, and if he should come in time, would he have power to help us, using such mysterious influence, Spanish or English, as he seemed to possess? And if he could help us, would it be better to fall into his hands than into those of the exasperated Santonese? I felt quite certain that the Duchess would say "No!"

So it mattered not what I answered myself. Indeed, I hoped, now Master Lindstrom had appeared, that the women would be allowed to go free; and it seemed to me that to surrender to Clarence would be to hand over the Duchess to her enemy, simply that the rest of us might escape.

Master Lindstrom returned while I was still considering this, and, observing the same precautions as before, I bade him join me. "Well?" I said, not so impetuously, I hope, as Mistress Anne, yet I daresay with a good deal of eagerness. "Well, what do they say?" For he was slow to speak.

"I have bad news," he answered gently.

"Ah!" I ejaculated, a lump—which was due

as much to rage as to any other emotion—rising in my throat. “So they will give us no terms? Then so be it! Let them come and take us.”

“Nay,” he hastened to answer. “It is not so bad as that, lad. They are fathers and husbands themselves, and not *lanzknechts*. They will suffer the women to go free, and will even let me take charge of them if necessary.”

“They will!” I exclaimed, overjoyed. I wondered why on earth he had hesitated to tell me this. “Why, that is the main point, friend.”

“Yes,” he said gravely, “perhaps so. More, the men may go too, if the tower be surrendered within an hour—with one exception, that is. The man who struck the blow must be given up, to be dealt with by them.”

“The man who struck the blow,” I repeated slowly. “Do you mean—you mean the man who cut the patrol down?”

“Yes,” he said. He was peering very closely at me, as though he would learn from my face who it was. And I stood thinking. This was as much as we could expect. I divined, and most truly, that but for the honest Dutchman’s influence, promises, perhaps bribes, such terms would never have been offered to us by the men who two hours before had driven us to hold, as

if we had been vermin. Yet give up Master Bertie? "What," I said, "will be done to him? The man who must be given up, I mean?" Master Lindstrom shook his head. "It was an accident," I urged, my eyes on his.

He grasped my hand firmly, and, turning away his face, seemed for a while unable to speak. At last he whispered: "He must suffer for the others, my lad. I fear so. It is a hard fate, a cruel fate; but I can do no more. They will not hear me on this. It is true, he will be first tried by the magistrates, but there is little hope. They are very hard."

My heart sank. I stood irresolute, pondering on what we ought to do, pondering on what I should say to the wife who so loved the man who must die. What could I say? Yet something I must say, somehow I must break the news. I asked Master Lindstrom to wait where he was while I consulted the others; adding, "You will answer for it that there will be no attack while you are here, I suppose?"

"I will," he said. "You may count on that."

I knew I could trust him, and I went in to the Duchess, closing the door behind me. A change had come over the room since I left it. The moon had risen and was flinging its cold

white light through the twisted and shattered framework of the window, painting, as it were, three bright panels on the floor. The torches in the street had for the most part burned out, or been extinguished. In place of the red glare, the shouts and the crash of glass, the atmosphere of battle and strife I had left, I found this silvery light and a stillness made more apparent by the distant hum of many voices.

Mistress Anne was standing just within the threshold, her face showing pale against the gloom, her hands clasped. The Duchess was kneeling by her husband; but she looked up as I entered, and gazed at me, expectant.

"They will let us all go," I said bluntly—it was best to tell the tale at once—"except the one who hurt the patrol, that is."

It was strange how differently the two women received the news. While Mistress Anne flung her hands to her face with a sobbing cry of thankfulness, and leaned against the wall crying and shaking, my lady stood up straight and still, breathing hard, but saying nothing. I saw that she did not need to ask what would be done to the one who was excepted. She knew. "No," she murmured at last, her hands pressed to her bosom, "we cannot do it! Oh, no, no!"

"I fear we must," I said gently—calmly too, I think. Yet in saying it I was not quite myself. An odd sensation was growing upon me in the stillness of the room. I began on a sudden, I did not know why, to thrill with excitement, to tremble with nervousness, such as would rather have become one of the women than a man. My head grew hot, my heart began to beat quickly. I caught myself looking out, listening, waiting for something to happen, something to be said. It was something more terrible, as it seemed to me, than the din and crash of the worst moments of the assault. What was it? What was it that was threatening my being? An instant and I knew.

"Oh, no, never!" the Duchess cried again, her voice quivering, her face full of keenest pain. "We will not give you up. We will stand or fall together, friend."

Give *you* up! Give *you* up! The veil was lifted now, and I saw what the something with the cold breath going before it was. I looked quietly from her to her husband; and I asked—I fancy she thought my question strangely irrelevant at that moment—"How is he? Is he better?"

"Much better. He knew me for a moment," she answered. "Then he seemed to sink away again. But his eyes were quite clear."

I stood gazing down at his thin face, which had ever looked so kindly into mine. My fingers played idly with the knot of my sword. "He will live?" I asked abruptly, harshly.

She started at the sudden question. But, brutal as it must have sounded, she was looking at me in pity so great and generous that it did not wound her. "Oh, yes," she said, her eyes still clinging to me. "I think he will live, thank Heaven!"

Thank Heaven! Ah, yes, thank Heaven!

I turned and went slowly towards the door. But before I reached it she was at my side, nay, was on her knees by me, clasping my hand, looking up to me with streaming eyes. "What are you going to do?" she cried, reading, I suppose, something in my face.

"I will see if Master Lindstrom cannot get better terms for us," I answered.

She rose, still detaining me. "You are sure?" she said, still eyeing me jealously.

"Quite sure," I answered, forcing a smile. "I will come back and report to you."

She let me go then, and I went out and joined Lindstrom on the staircase.

"Are you certain," I asked, speaking in a

whisper, "that they will—that the town will keep its word and let the others go?"

"I am quite sure of it," he replied, nodding. "They are Germans, and hard and pitiless, but you may trust them. So far I will answer for them."

"Then we accept," I said gravely. "I give myself up. I did it. Let them take me. And do you, friend, have charge of the others, and see that they come to no harm."

CHAPTER II.

BEFORE THE COURT.

I HAD not seen the first moonbeams pierce the broken casement of the tower-room, but I was there to watch the last tiny patch of silver glide aslant from wall to sill, and sill to frame, and so pass out. Near the fire, which had been made up, and now glowed and crackled bravely on the hearthstone at my elbow, my three gaolers had set a mattress for me; and on this I sat, my back to the wall and my face to the window. The guards lounged on the other side of the hearth round a lanthorn, playing at dice and drinking. They were rough, hard men, whose features, as they leaned over the table and the light played strongly on their faces, blazoning them against a wall of shadow, were stern and rugged enough. But they had not shown themselves unkindly. They had given me a share of their wine, and had pointed to the window and shrugged their shoulders, as much as to say that it was my own

fault if I suffered from the draught. Nay, from time to time, one of them would turn from his game and look at me—in pity, I think—and utter a curse that was meant for encouragement.

Even when the first excitement had passed away, I felt none of the stupefaction which I have heard that men feel in such a position. My brain was painfully active. In vain I longed to sleep, if it were only that I might not be thought to fear death. But the fact that I was to be tried first, though the sentence was a certainty, distracted and troubled me. My thoughts paced from thing to thing: now dwelling on the Duchess and her husband, now flitting to Petronilla and Sir Anthony, to the old place at home and the servants; to strange petty things, long familiar—a tree in the chase at Coton, a herb I had planted. Once a great lump rose in my throat, and I had to turn away to hide the hot tears that would rise at the thought that I must die in this mean German town, in this unknown corner, and be buried and forgotten! And once, too, to torment me, there rose a doubt in my mind whether Master Bertie would recover; whether, indeed, I had not thrown my life away for nothing. But it was too late to think of that! And the doubt,

which the Evil One himself must have suggested, so terrible was it, passed away quickly.

My thoughts raced, but the night crawled. We had surrendered about ten, and the magistrates, less pitiful than the gaolers, had forbidden my friends to stay with me. An hour or more after midnight two of the men lay down, and the other sat humming a drinking-song, or at intervals rose to yawn, and stretch himself and look out of the window. From time to time the cry of the watchman going his rounds came drearily to my ears, recalling to me the night I had spent behind the hoarding in Moorgate Street, when the adventure which was to end to-morrow—nay, to-day, in a few hours—had lured me away. To-day? Was I to die to-day? To perish with all my plans, hopes, love? It seemed impossible—and I so young! As I gazed at the window, whose shape began to be printed on my brain, it seemed impossible. My soul so rose in rebellion against it that the perspiration stood on my brow, and I had to clasp my hands about my knees and strain every muscle to keep in the cry I would have uttered!—a cry not of fear, but of rage and remonstrance and revolt.

I was glad to see the first streaks of dawn, to hear the first cock-crowings, and, a few minutes

later, the voices of men in the street and on the stairs. The sounds of day and life acted magically upon me. The horror of the night passed off as does the horror of a dream. When a man, heavily cloaked and with his head covered, came in, the door being shut behind him by another hand, I looked up at him bravely. The worst was past.

He replied by looking down at me for a few moments without disclosing himself, the collar of his cloak being raised so high that I could see nothing of his features. My first notion that he must be Master Lindstrom passed away; and, displeased by his silent scrutiny, and thinking him a stranger, I said sharply, "I hope you are satisfied, sir."

"Satisfied?" he replied, in a voice which made me start so, that the irons clanked on my feet. "Well, I think I should be—seeing you so, my friend!"

It was Clarence! Of all men, Clarence! I knew his voice, and he, seeing himself recognised, lowered his cloak. I stared at him in stupefied silence, and he at me in a grim curiosity. Nevertheless I was not prepared for the blunt abruptness with which he continued—using almost the very words he had used when face to face with

me in the flood—"Now tell me who you are, and what brought you into this company?"

I gave him no answer. I still stared at him in silence.

"Come!" he continued, his hawk's eyes bent on my face, "make a clean breast of it, and perhaps—who knows?—I may help you yet, lad. You have puzzled and foiled me, and I want to understand you. Where did my lady pick you up just when she wanted you? I had arranged for every chequer on the board except you. Who are you?"

This time I did answer him—by a question. "How many times have we met?" I asked.

"Three," he said readily, "and the last time you nearly rid the world of me. Now the luck is against you. It generally is in the end against those who thwart me, my friend." He chuckled at the conceit, and I read in his face at once his love of intrigue and his vanity. "I come uppermost, as always."

I only nodded.

"What do you want?" I asked. I felt a certain expectation. He wanted something.

"First, to know who you are."

"I shall not tell you!" I answered.

He smiled drily, sitting opposite to me. He

had drawn up a stool, and made himself comfortable. He was not an uncomely man as he sat there playing with his dagger, a dubious smile on his lean, dark face. Unwarned, I might have been attracted by the masterful audacity, the intellect as well as the force which I saw stamped on his features. Being warned, I read cunning in his bold eyes and cruelty in the curl of his lip.

“What do you want next?” I asked.

“I want to save your life,” he replied lightly.

At that I started—I could not help it.

“Ha! ha!” he laughed; “I thought the stoicism did not go quite down to the bottom, my lad. But there, it is true enough I have come to help you. I have come to save your life if you will let me.”

I strove in vain to keep entire mastery over myself. The feelings to which he appealed were too strong for me. My voice sounded strange even in my own ears as I said hoarsely—

“It is impossible! What can you do?”

“What can I do?” he answered with a stern smile. “Much! I have, boy, a dozen strings in my hands, and a neck—a life at the end of each!”

He raised his hand, and, extending the fingers moved them to and fro.

"See! see! A life, a death!" he exclaimed. "And for you, I can and will save your life—on one condition."

"On one condition?" I murmured.

"Ay, on one condition; but it is a very easy one. I will save your life on my part; and you, on yours, must give me a little assistance. Do you see? Then we shall be quits."

"I do not understand," I said dully. I did not. His words had set my heart fluttering so, that I could for the moment take in only one idea—that here was a new hope of life.

"It is very simple," he resumed, speaking slowly. "Certain plans of mine require that I should get your friend the Duchess conveyed back to England. But for you I should have succeeded before this. In what you have hindered me, you can now help me. You have their confidence, and great influence with them. All I ask is that you will use that influence so that they may be at a certain place at a certain hour. I will contrive the rest. It shall never be known, I promise you, that you——"

"Betrayed them!"

"Well, gave me some information," he said lightly, puffing away my phrase with his lips.

"No. Betrayed them!" I persisted.

"Put it so, if you please," he replied, shrugging his shoulders and raising his eyebrows. "What is in a word?"

"You are the tempter himself, I think!" I cried in bitter rage—for it *was* bitter—bitter indeed to feel that new-born hope die out. "But you come to me in vain. I defy you!"

"Softly! softly!" he answered with calmness.

Yet I saw a little pulse beating in his cheek which seemed to tell of some emotion kept in subjection.

"It frightens you at first," he said. "But listen. You will do them no harm, and yourself good. I shall get them any way, both the Duchess and her husband; though, without your aid, it will be more difficult. Why, help of that kind is given every day. They need never know it. Even now there is one of whom you little dream who has——"

"Silence!" I cried fiercely. "I care not. I defy you!"

I could think of only one thing. I was wild with rage and disappointment. His words had aggravated the pain of every regret, every clinging to life I felt.

"Go!" I cried. "Go and leave me, you villain!"

"If I do leave you," he said, fixing his eyes on me, "it will be, my friend—to death."

"Then so be it!" I answered wildly. "So be it! I will keep my honour."

"Your honour!" The mask dropped from his face, and he sneered as he rose from his seat. A darker scowl changed and disfigured his brow, as he lost hope of gaining me. "Your honour! Where will it be by to-night?" he hissed, his eyes glowering down at me. "Where a week hence, when you will be cast into a pit and forgotten? Your honour, fool! What is the honour of a dead man? Pah! But, die then, if you will have it so! Die, like the brainless brute you are! And rot, and be forgotten!" he concluded passionately.

They were terrible words; more terrible I know now than either he or I understood then. They so shook me that when he was gone I crouched trembling on my pallet, hiding my face in a fit of horror—taking no heed of my gaolers or of appearances. "Die and be forgotten! Die and be forgotten!" The doom rang in my ears.

Something which seemed to me angelic roused me from this misery. It was the sound of a kindly familiar voice speaking English. I looked up and found the Dutchman bending over me with a face

of infinite distress. With him, but rather behind him, stood Van Tree, pale and vicious-eyed, tugging his scanty chin-beard and gazing about him like a dog seeking someone to fasten upon.

"Poor lad! poor lad!" the old man said, his voice shaking as he looked at me.

I sprang to my feet, the irons rattling as I dashed my hand across my eyes.

"It is all right!" I said hurriedly. "I had a—but never mind that. It has passed like a dream. Only tell the Duchess to look to herself," I continued, still rather vehemently. "Clarence is here. He is in Santon. I have seen him."

"You have seen him?" both the Dutchmen cried at once.

"Ay!" I said with a laugh that was three parts hysterical—indeed, I was still tingling all over with excitement. "He has been here to offer me my life, if I would help him in his schemes. I told him he was the devil, and defied him. And he—he said I should die and be forgotten!" I added trembling, yet laughing wildly at the same time.

"I think he *is* the devil!" said Master Lindstrom solemnly, his face very grim. "And therefore a liar and the father of lies! You may die, lad, to-day; perhaps you must. But forgotten you

shall not be while we live, or one of us lives, or one of the children who shall come after us. He is a liar!"

I got my hands, with a struggle, from the old man, and, turning my back upon him, went and looked out of the window. The sun was rising. The tower of the great minster, seen now for the first time, rose in stately brightness above the red roofs and quaint gables and the rows of dormer windows. Down in the streets the greyness and chill yet lingered. But all above was a very glory of light and warmth and colour—the rising of the May sun. When I turned round I was myself again. The calm beauty of that sight had stolen into my soul. "Is it time?" I said cheerfully. For the crowd was gathering below, and there were voices and feet on the stairs.

"I think it is," Master Lindstrom answered. "We have obtained leave to go with you. You need fear no violence in the streets, for the man who was hurt is still alive and may recover. I have been with the magistrates this morning," he continued, "and found them better disposed to you; but the Sub-dean has joint jurisdiction with them, as the deputy of the Bishop of Arras, who is dean of the minster; and he is, for some reason, very bitter against you."

"The Bishop of Arras? Granvelle, do you mean?" I asked. I knew the name of the Emperor's shrewd and powerful Minister, by whose advice the Netherlands were at this time ruled.

"The same. He, of course, is not here, but his deputy is. Were it not for him—but there, it is no good talking of that!" the Dutchman said, breaking off and rubbing his head in chagrin.

One of the guards who had spent the night with me brought me at this moment a bowl of broth with a piece of bread in it. I could not eat the bread, but I drank the broth, and felt the better for it. Having in my pocket a little money with which the Duchess had furnished me, I put a silver piece in the bowl and handed it back to him. The man seemed astonished, and muttered something in German as he turned away.

"What did he say?" I asked the Dutchman.

"Oh, nothing, nothing," he answered.

"But what was it? It was something," I persisted, seeing him confused.

"He—well, he said he would have a mass said for you!" the old man answered in despair.

"It will do you no harm."

"No, why should it?" I replied mechanically.

We were in the street by this time, Master

Lindstrom and Van Tree walking beside me in the middle of a score of soldiers, who seemed to my eyes fantastically dressed. I remarked, as we passed out, a tall man clothed in red and black, who was standing by the door as if waiting to fall in behind me. He carried on his shoulder a long broad-bladed sword, and I guessed who he was, seeing how Master Lindstrom strove to intercept my view of him. But I was not afraid of *that*. I had heard long ago—perhaps six months in time, but it seemed long ago—how bravely Queen Jane had died. And if a girl had not trembled, surely a man should not. So I looked steadfastly at him and took great courage, and after that was able to gaze calmly on the people, who pressed to stare at me, peeping over the soldiers' shoulders, and clustering in every doorway and window to see me go past. They were all silent, and it even seemed to me that some—but this may have been my fancy—pitied me.

I saw nothing of the Duchess, and might have wondered, had not Master Lindstrom explained that he had contrived to keep her in ignorance of the hour fixed for the proceedings. Her husband was better, he said, and conscious; but, for fear of exciting him, they were keeping the news from him also. I remember I felt for a moment very

sore at this, and then I tried to persuade myself that it was right.

The distance through the streets was short and almost before I was aware of it I was in the court-house, the guard had fallen back, and I was standing before three persons who were seated behind a long table. Two of them were grave, portly men wearing flat black caps and scarlet robes, with gold chains about their necks. The third, dressed as an ecclesiastic, wore a huge gem-ring upon his thumb. Behind them stood three attendants holding a sword, a crosier, and a ducal cap upon a cushion; and above and behind all was a lofty stained window, whose rich hues, the sun being low as yet, shot athwart the corbels of the roof. At the end of the table sat a black-robed man with an ink-horn and spectacles, a grave, still, down-looking man; and the crowd being behind me, and preserving a dead silence, and the attendants standing like statues, I seemed indeed to be alone with these four at the table, and the great stained window and the solemn hush. They talked to one another in low tones for a minute, gazing at me the while. And I fancied they were astonished to find me so young.

At length they all fell back into their chairs.

"Do you speak German?" the eldest burgher said, addressing me gravely. He sat in the middle, with the Sub-dean on his right.

"No; but I speak and understand Spanish," I answered in that language, feeling chilled already by the stern formality which like an iron hand was laying its grip upon me.

"Good! Your name?" replied the president.

"I am commonly called Francis Carey, and I am an Englishman." The Sub-dean—he was a pale, stout man, with gloomy eyes—had hitherto been looking at me in evident doubt. At this he nodded assent, and, averting his eyes from me, gazed meditatively at the roof of the hall, considering apparently what he should have for breakfast.

"You are charged," said the president slowly, consulting a document, "with having assaulted and wounded in the highway last night one Heinrich Schröder, a citizen of this town, acting at the time as Lieutenant of the Night Guard. Do you admit this, prisoner, or do you require proof?"

"He was wounded," I answered steadily, "but by accident, and in error. I supposed him to be one of three persons who had unlawfully waylaid me and my party on the previous night between Emmerich and Wesel."

The Sub-dean, still gazing at the roof, shook his head with a faint smile. The other magistrates looked doubtfully at me, but made no comment, and my words seemed to be wasted on the silence. The president consulted his document again, and continued. "You are also charged with having by force of arms, in time of peace, seized a gate of this town, and maintained it, and declined to surrender it when called upon so to do. What do you say to that, prisoner?"

"It is true in part," I answered firmly. "In part untrue. I seized not the gate, but part of the tower, in order to preserve my life, and to protect certain ladies travelling with me from the violence of a crowd, which, under a misapprehension, was threatening to do us a mischief."

The priest again shook his head, and smiled faintly at the carved roof. His colleagues were perhaps somewhat moved in my favour, for a few words passed between them. However, in the end they shook their heads, and the president mechanically asked me if I had anything further to say.

"Nothing!" I replied bitterly. The ecclesiastic's cynical heedlessness, his air of one whose mind is made up, seemed so cruel to me whose life was at stake, that I lost patience. "Except

what I have said," I continued—"that for the wounding, it was done in error; and for the gate-seizing, I would do it again to save the lives of those with me. Only that and this: that I am a foreigner ignorant of your language and customs, desiring only to pass peacefully through your country."

"That is all?" the president asked impassively.

"All," I answered, yet with a strange tightening at my throat. Was it all? All I could say for my life?

I was waiting, sore and angry and desperate, to hear the sentence, when there came an interruption. Master Lindstrom, whose presence at my side I had forgotten, broke suddenly into a torrent of impassioned words, and his urgent voice ringing through the court seemed in a moment to change its aspect—to infuse into it some degree of life and sympathy. More than one guttural exclamation, which seemed to mark approval, burst from the throng at the back of the hall. In another moment, indeed, the Dutchman's courage might have saved me. But there was one who marked the danger. The Sub-dean, who had at first only glowered at the speaker in rude astonishment, now cut him short with a harsh question.

"One moment, Master Dutchman!" he cried. "Are you one of the heretics who call themselves Protestants?"

"I am. But I understand that there is here liberty of conscience," our friend answered manfully, nothing daunted in his fervour at finding the attack turned upon himself.

"That depends upon the conscience," the priest answered with a scowl. "We will have no Anabaptists here, nor foreign praters to bring us into feud with our neighbours. It is enough that such men as you are allowed to live. We will not be bearded by you, so take warning! Take heed, I say, Master Dutchman, and be silent!" he repeated, leaning forward and slapping his hand upon the table.

I touched Master Lindstrom's sleeve—who would of himself have persisted—and stayed him. "It is of no use," I muttered. "That dog in a rochet has condemned me. He will have his way!"

There was a short debate between the three judges, while in the court you might have heard a pin drop. Master Lindstrom had fallen back once more. I was alone again, and the stained window seemed to be putting forth its mystic influence to enfold me, when, looking up, I saw a

tiny shadow flit across the soft, many-hued rays which streamed from it athwart the roof. It passed again, once, twice, thrice. I peered upwards intently. It was a swallow flying to and fro amid the carved work.

Yes, a swallow. And straightway I forgot the judges, forgot the crowd. The scene vanished, and I was at Coton End again, giving Martin Luther the nest for Petronilla—a sign, as I meant it then, that I should return. I should never return now. Yet my heart was on a sudden so softened that, instead of this reflection giving me pain, as one would have expected, it only filled me with a great anxiety to provide for the event. She must not wait and watch for me day after day, perhaps year after year. I must see to it somehow; and I was thinking with such intentness of this that it was only vaguely I heard the sentence pronounced. It might have been some other person who was to be beheaded at the east gate an hour before noon. And so, God save the Duke!

CHAPTER III.

IN THE DUKE'S NAME.

THEY took me back to the room in the tower, it being now nearly ten o'clock. Master Lindstrom would fain have stayed with me constantly to the end, but having the matter I have mentioned much on my mind, I begged him to go and get me writing materials. When he returned, Van Tree was with him. With a particularity very curious at that moment, I remarked that the latter was carrying something.

"Where did you get that?" I said sharply and at once.

"It is your haversack," he answered, setting it down quietly. "I found the man who had taken possession of your horse, and got it from him. I thought there might be something in it you might like."

"It is my haversack," I assented. "But it was not on my horse. I have not seen it since I left it in Master Lindstrom's house by the river.

I left it on the pallet in my room there, and it was forgotten. I searched for it at Emmerich, you remember."

"I only know," he replied, "that I discovered it behind the saddle of the horse you were riding yesterday."

He thought that I had become confused and was a little wrong-headed from excitement. Master Lindstrom also felt troubled, as he told me afterwards, at seeing me taken up with a trifle at such a time.

But there was nothing wrong with my wits, as I promptly showed them.

"The horse I was riding yesterday?" I continued. "Ah! then that explains it. I was riding the horse which I took from the Spanish trooper. The Spaniard must have annexed the haversack when he and his companions searched the house after our departure."

"That is it, no doubt," Master Lindstrom said. "And in the hurry of yesterday's ride you failed to notice it."

It was a strange way of recovering one's property—strange that the enemy should have helped one to it. But there are times—and this to me was one—when the strange seems the ordinary and commonplace. I took the sack and slipped

my hand through a well-known slit in the lining. Yes, the letter I had left there was there still—the letter to Mistress Clarence. I drew it out. The corners of the little packet were frayed, and the parchment was stained and discoloured—no doubt, by the damp which had penetrated to it. But the seal was whole. I placed it, as it was, in Master Lindstrom's hands.

“Give it,” I said, “to the Duchess afterwards. It concerns her. You have heard us talk about it. Bid her make what use she pleases of it.”

I turned away then and sat down, feeling a little flurried and excited, as one about to start upon a journey might feel; not afraid, nor exceedingly depressed, but braced up to make a brave show and hide what sadness I did feel by the knowledge that many eyes were upon me, and that more would be watching me presently. At the farther end of the room a number of people had now gathered, and were conversing together. Among them were not only my gaolers of the night, but two or three officers, a priest who had come to offer me his services, and some inquisitive gazers who had obtained admission. Their curiosity, however, did not distress me. On the contrary, I was glad to hear the stir and murmur of life about me to the last.

I will not set down the letter I wrote to the Duchess, though it were easy for me to do so, seeing that her son has it now. It contains some things very proper to be said by a dying man, of which I am not ashamed—God forbid!—but which it would not be meet for me to repeat here. Enough that I told her in a few words who I was, and entreated her, in the name of whatever services I had rendered her, to let Petronilla and Sir Anthony know how I had died. And I added something which would, I thought, comfort her and her husband—namely, that I was not afraid, or in any suffering of mind or body.

The writing of this shook my composure a little. But as I laid down the pen, and looked up and found that the time was come, I took courage in a marvellous manner. The captain of the guard—I think that out of a compassionate desire not to interrupt me they had allowed me some minutes of grace—came to me, leaving the group at the other end, and told me gravely that I was waited for. I rose at once and gave the letter to Master Lindstrom with some messages, in which Dymphna and Anne were not forgotten. And then with a smile—for I felt, under all those eyes, as if I were going into battle—I said, “Gentlemen, I am ready if you are. It is a fine day

to die. You know," I added gaily, "in England we have a proverb, 'The better the day, the better the deed!' So it is well to have a good day to have a good death, Sir Captain."

"A soldier's death, sir, is a good death," he answered gravely, speaking in Spanish and bowing.

Then he pointed to the door.

As I walked towards it, I paused momentarily by the window, and looked out on the crowd below. It filled the sunlit street—save where a little raised platform strewn with rushes protruded itself—with heads from wall to wall, with faces all turned one way—towards me. It was a silent crowd, standing in hushed awe and expectation, the consciousness of which for an instant sent a sudden chill to my heart, blanching my cheek, and making my blood run slow for a moment. The next I moved on to the door, and, bowing to the spectators as they stood aside, began to descend the narrow staircase.

There were guards going down before me, and behind me were Master Lindstrom and more guards. The Dutchman reached forward in the gloom, and clasped my hand, holding it as we went down in a firm, strong grip.

"Never fear," I said to him cheerily, looking back. "It is all right."

He answered in words which I will not write here—not wishing, as I have said, to make certain things common.

I suppose the doorway at the bottom was accidentally blocked, for a few steps short of it we came to a standstill; and almost at the same moment I started, despite myself, on hearing a sudden clamour and a roar of many voices outside.

“What is it?” I asked the Dutchman.

“It is the Duke of Cleves arriving, I expect,” he whispered. “He comes in by the other gate. They are cheering him.”

A moment later we moved on and passed out into the light, the soldiers before me stepping on either side to give me place. The sunshine for an instant dazzled me, and I lowered my eyes. As I gradually raised them again, I saw before me a short lane formed by two rows of spectators kept back by guards; and at the end of this, two or three rough wooden steps leading to a platform on which were standing a number of people. And above and beyond all only the bright blue sky, the roofs and gables of the nearer houses showing dark against it.

I advanced steadily along the path left for me, and would have ascended the steps. But at

the foot of them I came to a standstill, and looked round for guidance. The persons on the scaffold all had their backs turned to me, and did not make way, while the shouting and uproar hindered them from hearing that we had come out. Then it struck me, seeing that the people at the windows were also gazing away, and taking no heed of me, that the Duke was passing the farther end of the street, and a sharp pang of angry pain shot through me. I had come out to die, but that which was all to me was so little to these people that they turned away to see a fellow-mortal ride by!

Presently, as we stood there, in a pit, as it were, getting no view, I felt Master Lindstrom's hand, which still clasped mine, begin to shake; and turning to him, I found that his face had changed to a deep red, and that his eyes were protruding with a kind of convulsive eagerness which instantly infected me.

"What is it?" I stammered. I began to tremble also. The air rang, as it seemed to me, with one word, which a thousand tongues took up and reiterated. But it was a German word, and I did not understand it.

"Wait! wait!" Master Lindstrom exclaimed. "Pray God it be true!"

He seized my other hand, and held it as though he would protect me from something. At the same moment Van Tree pushed past me, and, bounding up the steps, thrust his way through the officials on the scaffold, causing more than one fur-robed citizen near the edge to lose his balance and come down as best he could on the shoulders of the guards.

"What is it?" I cried. "What is it?" I cried in impatient wonder.

"Oh! my lad, my lad!" Master Lindstrom answered, his face close to mine, and the tears running down his cheeks. "It is cruel if it be not true! Cruel! They cry a pardon!"

"A pardon?" I echoed.

"Ay, lad, a pardon. But it may not be true," he said, putting his arm about my shoulder. "Do not make too sure of it. It is only the mob cry it out."

My heart made a great bound and seemed to stand still. There was a loud surging in my brain, and a mist rose before my eyes and hid everything. The clamour and shouting of the street passed away, and sounded vague and distant. The next instant, it is true, I was myself again, but my knees were trembling under me, and I stood flaccid and unnerved, leaning on my friend.

"Well?" I said faintly.

"Patience! patience awhile, lad!" he answered.

But thank Heaven I had not long to wait. The words were scarcely off his tongue, when another hand sought mine and shook it wildly; and I saw Van Tree before me, his face radiant with joy, while a man whom he had knocked down in his hasty leap from the scaffold was rising beside me with a good-natured smile. As if at a signal, every face now turned towards me. A dozen friendly hands passed me up the steps amid a fresh outburst of cheering. The throng on the scaffold opened somehow, and I found myself in a second, as it seemed, face to face with the president of the court. He smiled on me gravely and kindly—what smiles there seemed to be on all their faces!—and held out a paper.

"In the name of the Duke!" he said, speaking in Spanish in a clear loud voice. "A pardon!"

I muttered something, I know not what; nor did it matter, for it was lost in a burst of cheering. When this was over, and silence obtained, the magistrate continued, "You are required, however, to attend the Duke at the court-house. Whither we had better proceed at once."

"I am ready, sir," I muttered.

A road was made for us to descend, and

walking in a kind of beautiful dream I passed slowly up the street by the side of the magistrate, the crowd everywhere willingly standing aside for us. I do not know whether all those thousands of faces really looked joyfully and kindly on me as I passed, or whether the deep thankfulness which choked me and brought the tears continually to my eyes, transfigured them and gave them a generous charm not their own. But this I do know—that the sunshine seemed brighter and the air softer than ever before; that the clouds trailing across the blue expanse were things of beauty such as I had never met before; that to draw breath was a joy, and to move, delight; and that only when the dark valley was left behind did I comprehend its full gloom—by Heaven's mercy. So may it be with all!

At the door of the court-house, whither numbers of the people had already run, the press was so great that we came to a standstill, and were much buffeted about, though in all good-humour, before, even with the aid of the soldiers, we could be got through the throng. When I at last emerged, I found myself again before the table, and saw—but only dimly, for the light now fell through the stained window directly on my head—a commanding figure standing behind it. Then

a strange thing happened. A woman passed swiftly round the table, and came to me and flung her arms round my neck and kissed me. It was the Duchess, and for a moment she hung upon me, weeping before them all.

"Madam," I said softly, "then it is you who have done this!"

"Ah!" she exclaimed, holding me off from her and looking at me with eyes which glowed through her tears, "and it was you who did that!"

She drew back from me then, and taking me by the hand, turned impetuously to the Duke of Cleves, who stood behind, smiling at her in frank amusement. "This," she said, "is the man who gave his life for my husband, and to whom your Highness has given it back."

"Let him tell his tale," the Duke answered gravely. "And do you, my cousin, sit here beside me."

She left me and walked round the table, and he came forward and placed her in his own chair amid a great hush of wonder, for she was still meanly clad, and showed in a hundred places the marks and stains of travel. Then he stood by her, with his hand on the back of the seat. He was a tall, burly man, with bold, quick-glancing eyes, a flushed face, and a loud manner: a fierce,

blustering prince, as I have heard. He was plainly dressed in a leather hunting-suit, and wore huge gauntlets and brown boots, with a broad-leaved hat pinned up on one side. Yet he looked a prince.

Somehow I stammered out the tale of the surrender.

"But why? why? why, man?" he asked when I had finished—"why did you let them think it was you who wounded the burgher, if it was not?"

"Your Highness," I answered, "I had received nothing but good from her grace; I had eaten her bread and been received into her service. Besides, it was through my persuasion that we came by the road which led to this misfortune instead of by another way. Therefore it seemed to me right that I should suffer, who stood alone and could be spared—and not her husband."

"It was a great deed!" cried the prince loudly. "I would I had such a servant. Are you noble, lad?"

I coloured high, but not in pain or mortification. The old wound might reopen, but amid events such as those of this morning it was a slight matter. "I come of a noble family, may it

please your Highness," I answered modestly; "but circumstances prevent me claiming kinship with it."

He was about, I think, to question me further, when the Duchess looked up, and said something to him and he something to her. She spoke again and he answered. Then he nodded assent. "You would fain stand on your own feet?" he cried to me. "Is that so?"

"It is, sire," I answered.

"Then so be it!" he replied loudly, looking round on the throng with a frown. "I will ennoble you. You would have died for your lord and friend, and therefore I give you a rood of land in the common graveyard of Santon to hold of me, and I name you Von Santonkirch. And I, William Duke of Cleves, Julich and Guelders, prince of the Empire, declare you noble, and give you for your arms three swords of justice; and the motto you may buy of a clerk! Further, let this decree be enrolled in my chancery. Are you satisfied?"

As I dropped on my knees, my eyes sparkling, there was a momentary disturbance behind me. It was caused by the abrupt entrance of the Sub-dean. He took in part of the situation at a glance; that is, he saw me kneeling before the Duke. But he could not see the Duchess of Suf-

folk, the Duke's figure being interposed. As he came forward, the crowd making way for him, he cast an angry glance at me, and scarcely smoothed his brow even to address the prince. "I am glad that your Highness has not done what was reported to me," he said hastily, his obeisance brief and perfunctory. "I heard an uproar in the town, and was told that this man was pardoned."

"It is so!" said the Duke curtly, eyeing the ecclesiastic with no great favour. "He is pardoned."

"Only in part, I presume," the priest rejoined urgently. "Or, if otherwise, I am sure that your Highness has not received certain information with which I can furnish you."

"Furnish away, sir," the Duke said, yawning.

"I have had letters from my Lord Bishop of Arras respecting him."

"Respecting him!" exclaimed the prince, starting and bending his brows in surprise.

"Respecting those in whose company he travels," the priest answered hastily. "They are represented to me as dangerous persons, pestilent refugees from England, and obnoxious alike to the Emperor, the Prince of Spain, and the Queen of England."

"I wonder you do not add also to the King

of France and the Soldan of Turkey!" growled the Duke. "Pish! I am not going to be dictated to by Master Granvelle—no, nor by his master, be he ten times Emperor! Go to! go to! Master Sub-dean! You forget yourself, and so does your master the Bishop. I will have you know that these people are not what you think them. Call you my cousin, the widow of the consort of the late Queen of France, an obnoxious person? Fie! Fie! You forget yourself!"

He moved as he stopped speaking, so that the astonished churchman found himself confronted on a sudden by the smiling, defiant Duchess. The Sub-dean started and his face fell, for, seeing her seated in the Duke's presence, he discerned at once that the game was played out. Yet he rallied himself, bethinking him, I fancy, that there were many spectators. He made a last effort. "The Bishop of Arras——" he began.

"Pish!" scoffed the Duke, interrupting him.

"The Bishop of Arras——" the priest repeated firmly.

"I would he were hung with his own tapestry!" retorted the Duke, with a brutal laugh.

"Heaven forbid!" replied the ecclesiastic, his pale face reddening and his eyes darting baleful glances at me. But he took the hint, and hence-

forth said no more of the Bishop. Instead, he continued smoothly, "Your Highness has, of course, considered the danger—the danger, I mean, of provoking neighbours so powerful by shielding this lady and making her cause your own. You will remember, sir——"

"I will remember Innspruck!" roared the Duke in a rage, "where the Emperor, ay, and your everlasting Bishop, too, fled before a handful of Protestants, like sheep before wolves. A fig for your Emperor! I never feared him young, and I fear him less now that he is old and decrepit and, as men say, mad. Let him get to his watches, and you to your prayers. If there were not this table between us, I would pull your ears, Master Churchman!"

"But tell me," I asked Master Bertie, as I stood beside his couch an hour later. "How did the Duchess manage it? I gathered from something you or she said a short time back that you had no influence with the Duke of Cleves."

"Not quite that," he answered. "My wife and the late Duke of Suffolk had much to do with wedding the Prince's sister to King Henry, thirteen—fourteen years back, is it? And so far we might have felt confident of his protection. But the marriage turned out ill, or turned out short,

and Queen Anne of Cleves was divorced. And—well, we felt a little less confident on that account, particularly as he has the name of a head-strong, passionate man.”

“Heaven keep him in it,” I said, smiling. “But you have not told me yet what happened.”

“The Duchess was still asleep this morning, fairly worn out, as you may suppose, when a great noise awoke her. She got up and went to Dymphna, and learned it was the Duke’s trumpets. Then she went to the window, and, seeing few people in the street to welcome him, inquired why this was. Dymphna broke down at that, and told her what was happening to you, and that you were to die at that very hour. She went out straightway, without covering her head—you know how impetuous she is—and flung herself on her knees in the mud before the Duke’s horse as he entered. He knew her, and the rest you can guess.”

Can guess? Ah, what happiness it was! Outside, the sun fell hotly on the steep red roofs with their rows of casements, and on the sleepy square, in which knots of people still lingered, talking of the morning’s events. I could see below me the guard which Duke William, shrewdly mistrusting the Sub-dean, had posted in front of the house,

nominally to do the Duchess honour. I could hear in the next room the cheerful voices of my friends. What happiness it was to live! What happiness to be loved! How very, very good and beautiful and glorious a world seemed the world to me on that old May morning, in that quaint German town which we had entered so oddly!

As I turned from the window, full of thankfulness, my eyes met those of Mistress Anne, who was sitting on the far side of the sick man's couch, the baby in a cradle beside her. The risks and exposure of the last week had made a deeper mark upon her than upon any of us. She was paler, graver, older, more of a woman and less, much less, of a girl. And she looked very ill. Her eyes in particular seemed to have grown larger; and as they dwelt on me now, there was a strange and solemn light in them, under which I grew uneasy.

"You have been wonderfully preserved," she said presently, speaking dreamily, and as much to herself as to me.

"I have, indeed," I answered, thinking she referred only to my escape of the morning.

But she did not.

"There was, firstly, the time on the river when you were hurt with the oar," she continued, gaz-

ing absently at me, her hands in her lap; "and then the night when you saw Clarence with Dymphna."

"Or, rather, saw him without her," I interposed, smiling. It was strange that she should mention it as a fact, when at the time she had so scolded me for making the statement.

"And then," she continued, disregarding my interruption, "there was the time when you were stabbed in the passage; and again when you had the skirmish by the river; and then to-day you were within a minute of death. You have been wonderfully preserved!"

"I have," I assented thoughtfully. "The more as I suspect that I have to thank Master Clarence for all these little adventures."

"Strange—very strange!" she muttered, removing her eyes from me that she might fix them on the floor.

"What is strange?"

The abrupt questioner was the Duchess, who came bustling in at the moment. "What is strange?" she repeated, with a heightened colour and dancing eyes. "Shall I tell you?" She paused and looked brightly at me, holding something concealed behind her. I guessed in a moment, from the aspect of her face, what it was—the letter

which I had given to Master Lindstrom in the morning, and which, with a pardonable forgetfulness, I had failed to reclaim.

I turned very red. "It was not intended for you now," I said shyly. For in the letter I had told her my story.

"Pooh! pooh!" she cried. "It is just as I thought. A pretty piece of folly! No," she continued as I opened my mouth, "I am not going to keep your secret, sir. You may go down on your knees. It will be of no use. Richard, you remember Sir Anthony Cludde, of Coton End in Warwickshire?"

"Oh, yes," her husband said, rising on his elbow, while his face lit up, and I stood bashfully, shifting my feet.

"I have danced with him a dozen times, years ago!" she continued, her eyes sparkling with mischief. "Well, sir, this gentleman, Master Francis Carey, otherwise Von Santonkirch, is Francis Cludde, his nephew!"

"Sir Anthony's nephew?"

"Yes, and the son of Ferdinand Cludde, whom you also have heard of, of whom the less——"

She stopped, and turned quickly, interrupted by a half-stifled scream. It was a scream full of sudden horror and amazement and fear; and it

came from Mistress Anne. The girl had risen, and was gazing at me with distended eyes and blanched cheeks, and hands stretched out to keep me off—gazing, indeed, as if she saw in me some awful portent or some dreadful threat. She did not speak, but she began, without taking her eyes from me, to retreat towards the door.

“Hoity-toity!” cried my lady, stamping her foot in anger. “What has happened to the girl? What———”

What, indeed? The Duchess stopped, still more astonished. For, without uttering a word of explanation or apology, Mistress Anne reached the door, groped blindly for the latch, found it, and went out, her eyes, with the same haunted look of horror in them, fixed on me to the last.

CHAPTER IV.

A LETTER THAT HAD MANY ESCAPES.

“HOITY-TOITY!” the Duchess cried again, looking from one to another of us, when Anne had disappeared. “What has come to the little fool? Has she gone crazy?”

I shook my head, too completely at sea even to hazard a conjecture. Master Bertie shook his head also, keeping his eyes glued to the door, as if he could not believe Anne had really gone.

“I said nothing to frighten her!” my lady protested.

“Nothing at all,” I answered. For how should the announcement that my real name was Cludde terrify Mistress Anne Brandon nearly out of her senses?

“Well, no,” Master Bertie agreed, his thoughtful face more thoughtful than usual; “so far as I heard, you said nothing. But I think, my dear, that you had better follow her and learn what it is. She must be ill.”

The Duchess sat down. "I will go by-and-by," she said coolly. At which I was not much surprised, for I have always remarked that women have less sympathy with other women's ailments, especially of the nerves, than have men.

"For the moment I want to scold this brave, silly boy here!" she continued, looking so kindly at me that I blushed again, and forgot all about Mistress Anne. "To think of him leaving his home to become a wandering squire of dames merely because his father was a—well, not quite what he would have liked him to be! I remember something about him," she continued, pursing up her lips, and nodding her head at us. "I fancied him dead, however, years ago. But there! if every one whose father were not quite to his liking left home and went a-straying, Master Francis, all sensible folk would turn innkeepers, and make their fortunes."

"It was not only that which drove me from home," I explained. "The Bishop of Winchester gave me clearly to understand——"

"That Coton was not the place for you!" my lady exclaimed scornfully. "He is a sort of connection of yours, is he not? Oh, I know. And he thinks he has a kind of reversionary interest in the property! With you and your father out

of the way, and only your girl-cousin left, his interest is much more likely to come to hand. Do you see?"

I recalled what Martin Luther had said about the cuckoo. But I have since thought in all probability they both wronged Stephen Gardiner in this. He was not a man of petty mind, and his estate was equal to his high place. I think it more likely that his motive in removing me from Coton was chiefly the desire to use my services abroad, in conjunction, perhaps, with some remoter and darker plan for eventually devoting the Cludde property to the Church. Such an act of piety would have been possible had Sir Anthony died leaving his daughter unmarried, and would certainly have earned for the Chancellor Queen Mary's lasting favour. I think it the more likely to have been in his mind because his inability to persuade the gentry to such acts of restitution—King Harry had much enriched us—was always a sore point with the Queen, and more than once exposed him to her resentment.

"The strangest thing of all," the Duchess continued with alacrity, "seems to me to be this—that if he had not meddled with you, he would not have had his plans in regard to us thwarted. If he had not driven you from home, you would

never have helped me to escape from London, nor been with us to foil his agents."

"A Higher Power than the Chancellor arranged that!" said Master Bertie emphatically.

"Well, at any rate I am glad that you are you!" the Duchess answered, rising gaily. "A Cludde? Why, one feels at home again. And yet," she continued, her lips trembling suddenly, and her eyes filling with tears as she looked at me, "there was never house raised yet on nobler deed than yours."

"Go! go! go!" cried her husband, seeing my embarrassment. "Go and look to that foolish girl!"

"I will! Yet stop!" cried my lady, pausing when she was half-way across the floor, and returning. "I was forgetting that I have another letter to open. It is very odd that this letter was never opened before," she continued, producing that which had lain in my haversack. "It has had several narrow escapes. But this time I vow I will see inside it. You give me leave?"

"Oh, yes," I said, smiling. "I wash my hands of it. Whoever the Mistress Clarence to whom it is addressed may be, it is enough now that her name is Clarence! We have suffered too much at his hands."

"I open it, then?" my lady cried dramatically. I nodded. She took her husband's dagger and cut the green silk which bound the packet, and opened and read.

Only a few words. Then she stopped, and, looking off the paper, shivered. "I do not understand this," she murmured. "What does it mean?"

"No good! I'll be sworn!" Master Bertie replied, gazing at her eagerly. "Read it aloud, Katherine."

"'To Mistress A— B—. I am advertised by my trusty agent, Master Clarence, that he hath benefited much by your aid in the matter in which I have employed him. Such service goeth always for much, and never for naught with me. In which belief confirm yourself. For the present, working with him as heretofore, be secret, and on no account let your true sentiments come to light. So you will be the more valuable to me, even as it is more easy to unfasten a barred door from within than from without.'"

Here the Duchess broke off abruptly and turned on us a face full of wonder. "What does it mean?" she asked.

"Is that all?" her husband said.

"Not quite," she answered, returning to it and reading.

"Those whom you have hitherto served have too long made a mockery of sacred things, but their cup is full, and the business of seeing that they drink it lieth with me who am not wont to be slothful in these matters. Be faithful and secret. Good speed and fare you well.—Ste. Winton."

"One thing is quite clear!" said Master Bertie slowly. "That you and I are the persons whose cup is full. You remember how you once dressed up a dog in a rochet, and dandled it before Gardiner? And it is our matter in which Clarence is employed. Then who is it who has been co-operating with him, and whose aid is of so much value to him?"

"Even as it is easier," I muttered thoughtfully, "to unfasten a barred door from within than from without." What was it of which that strange sentence reminded me? Ha! I had it. Of the night on which we had fled from Master Lindstrom's house, when Mistress Anne had been seized with that odd fit of perverseness, and had almost opened the door looking upon the river, in spite of all I could say or do. It was of that the sentence reminded me. "To whom is it addressed?" I asked abruptly.

"To Mistress Clarence," my lady answered.

"No; inside, I mean."

"Oh! to Mistress A— B—. But that gives us no clue," she added. "It is a disguise. You see, they are the two first letters of the alphabet."

So they were. And the initial letters of Anne Brandon! I wondered that the Duchess did not see it, that she did not at once turn her suspicions towards the right quarter. But she was, for a woman, singularly truthful and confiding. And she saw nothing.

I looked at Master Bertie. He seemed puzzled, discerning, I fancy, how strangely the allusions pointed to Mistress Anne, but not daring at once to draw the inference. She was his wife's kinswoman by marriage—albeit a distant one—and much indebted to her. She had been almost as his own sister. She was young and fair, and to associate treachery and ingratitude such as this with her seemed almost too horrible.

Then why was I so clear-sighted as to read the riddle? Why was I the first to see the truth? Because, to be plain, I had felt for days a vague and ill-defined distrust of the girl. I had seen more of her odd fits and caprices than had the others. Looking back now, I could find a con-

firmation of my idea in a dozen things which had befallen us. I remembered how ill and stricken she had looked on the day when I first brought out the letter, and how strangely she had talked to me about it. I remembered Clarence's interview with—not Dymphna, as I had then thought—but, as I now guessed, Anne wearing her cloak. I recalled the manner in which she had used me to persuade Master Bertie to take the Wesel instead of the Santon road; no doubt she had told Clarence to follow in that direction, if by any chance we escaped him on the island. And her despair when she heard in the church porch that I had killed Clarence at the ford! And her utter abandonment to fear—poor guilty thing!—when she thought that all her devices had only led her with us to a dreadful death! These things, in the light in which I now viewed them, were cogent evidences against her.

“It must have been written to someone about us!” said the Duchess at length. “To someone in our confidence—on our side of the door, as he calls it.”

“Yes, that is certain,” I said.

“And on the wrapper he styles her Mistress Clarence. Now who——”

“Who could it have been? That is the ques-

tion we have to answer," Master Bertie replied drily. Hearing his voice, I knew he had come at last to the same conclusion to which I had jumped. "I think you may dismiss the servants from the inquiry," he continued. "The Bishop of Winchester would scarcely write to them in that style."

"Dismiss the servants? Then who is left?" she protested.

"I think——." He lost courage, hesitated, and broke off. She looked at him wonderingly. He turned to me and, gaining confirmation from my nod, began again. "I think I should ask A—B—," he said.

"A— B—?" she cried, still not seeing one whit.

"Yes; Anne Brandon," he answered sternly.

She repeated his words softly, and stood a moment gazing at him. In that moment she saw it all. She sat down suddenly on the chair beside her and shuddered violently, as if she had laid her hand unwittingly upon a snake. "Oh, Richard!" she whispered, "it is too horrible."

"I fear it is too true," he answered gloomily. "It explains much."

I shrank from looking at them, from meeting her eyes or his. I felt as if this shame had

come upon us all. The thought that the culprit might walk into the room at any moment filled me with terror. I turned away and looked through the window, leaving the husband and wife together.

"Is it only the name you are thinking of?" she muttered.

"No," he answered. "Before I left England to go to Calais I saw something pass between them—between her and Clarence—which surprised me. Only in the confusion of those last days it slipped from my memory for the time."

"I see," she said quietly. "The villain!"

Looking back on the events of the last week, I found many things made plain by the lurid light now cast upon them. I understood how Master Lindstrom's vase had come to be broken when we were discussing the letter, which in my hands must have been a perpetual terror to the girl. I discerned that she had purposely sown dissension between myself and Van Tree, and recalled how she had striven to persuade us not to leave the island; then, how she had induced us to take that unlucky road; finally, how on the road her horse had lagged and lagged behind, detaining us all, when every minute was precious. The things all dove-tailed into one another; each by

itself was weak, but together they formed a strong scaffold—a scaffold strong enough for the hanging of a man, if she had been a man! The others appealed to me, the Duchess feverishly anxious to be assured one way or the other. The very suspicion of the existence of such treachery at her side seemed to stifle her. Still looking out of the window I detailed the proofs I have mentioned—not gladly, Heaven knows, or in any spirit of revenge. But my duty was rather to my companions who had been true to me, than to her. I told them the truth so far as I knew it. The whole wretched, miserable truth was only to become known to me later.

“I will go to her,” the Duchess said presently, rising from her seat.

“My dear!” her husband cried. He stretched out his hand, and grasping her skirt detained her. “You will not——”

“Do not be afraid!” she replied sadly, as she stooped over him and kissed his forehead. “It is a thing past scolding, Richard; past love and even hope, and all but past pity. I will be merciful, as we hope for mercy; but she can never be friend of ours again, and someone must tell her. I will do so, and return. As for that man!” she continued, obscuring suddenly the fair and noble side

of her character which she had just exhibited, and which, I confess, had surprised me, for I had not thought her capable of a generosity so uncommon; "as for that man," she repeated, drawing herself up to her full height, while her eyes sparkled and her cheek grew red, "who has turned her into a vile schemer and a shameless hypocrite, as he would fain have turned better women, I will show him no mercy nor grace if I ever have him under my feet. I will crush him as I would an adder, though I be crushed next moment myself!"

She was sweeping with that word from the room, and had nearly reached the door, before I found my voice. Then I called out "Stay!" just in time. "You will do no good, madam, by going," I said, rising. "You will not find her. She is gone."

"Gone?"

"Yes," I said quietly. "She left the house twenty minutes ago. I saw her cross the market-place, wearing her cloak and carrying a bag. I do not think she will return."

"Not return? But whither has she gone?" they both cried at once.

I shook my head.

"I can only guess," I said in a low voice. "I saw no more than I have told you."

"But why did you not tell me?" the Duchess cried reproachfully. "She shall be brought back."

"It would be useless," Master Bertie answered. "Yet I doubt if it be as Carey thinks. Why should she go just at this time? She does not know that she is found out. She does not know that this letter has been recovered. Not a word, mind, was said of it before she left the room."

"No," I allowed; "that is true."

I was puzzled on this point myself, now I came to consider it. I could not see why she had taken the alarm so opportunely; but I maintained my opinion nevertheless.

"Something frightened her," I said; "though it may not have been the letter."

"Yes," said the Duchess, after a moment's silence, "I suppose you are right. I suppose something frightened her, as you say. I wonder what it was. Poor wretch!"

It turned out that I was right. Mistress Anne had gone indeed, having stayed, so far as we could learn, from an examination of the room which she had shared with Dymphna, merely to

put together the few things which our adventures had left her. She had gone out from amongst us in this foreign land without a word of farewell, without a good wish given or received, without a soul to say God speed! The thought made me tremble. If she had died even, it would have been different. Now, to feel sorrow for her as for one who had been with us in heart as well as in body, seemed a mockery. How could we grieve for one who had moved day by day and hour by hour among us, only that with each hour and day she might plot and scheme and plan our destruction? It was impossible!

We made inquiries indeed, but without result; and so, abruptly and terribly she passed—for the time—out of our knowledge, though often afterwards I recalled sadly the weary, hunted look which I had sometimes seen in her eyes when she sat listless and dreamy. Poor girl! Her own acts had placed her, as the Duchess said, beyond love or hope, but not beyond pity.

So it is in life. The day which sees one's trial end sees another's begin. We—the Duchess and her child, Master Bertie and I—stayed with our good and faithful friends the Lindstroms awhile, resting and recruiting our strength; and

during this interval, at the pressing instance of the Duchess, I wrote letters to Sir Anthony and Petronilla, stating that I was abroad, and was well, and looked presently to return; but not disclosing my refuge or the names of my companions. At the end of five days, Master Bertie being fairly strong again, and Santon being considered unsafe for us as a permanent residence, we went under guard to Wesel, where we were received as people of quality, and lodged, there being no fitting place, in the disused church of St. Willibrod. Here the child was christened Peregrine—a wanderer; the governor of the city and I being godfathers. And here we lived in peace—albeit with hearts that yearned for home—for some months.

During this time two pieces of news came to us from England: one, that the Parliament, though much pressed to it, had refused to acquiesce in the confiscation of the Duchess's estates; the other, that our joint persecutor, the great Bishop of Winchester, was dead. This last we at first disbelieved. It was true, nevertheless. Stephen Gardiner, whose vast schemes had enmeshed people so far apart in station and indeed in all else as the Duchess and myself, was dead at last; had died towards the end of 1555, at the height of

his power, with England at his feet, and gone to his Maker. I have known many worse men.

We trusted that this might open the way for our return, but we found, on the contrary, that fresh clouds were rising. The persecution of the Reformers, which Queen Mary had begun in England, was carried on with increasing rigour; and her husband, who was now King of Spain and master of the Netherlands, freed from the prudent checks of his father, was inclined to pleasure her in this by giving what aid he could abroad. His Minister in the Netherlands, the Bishop of Arras, brought so much pressure to bear upon our protector to induce him to give us up that it was plain the Duke of Cleves must sooner or later comply. We thought it better therefore to remove ourselves, and presently did so, going to the town of Winnheim, in the Rhine Palatinate.

We found ourselves not much more secure here, however, and all our efforts to discover a safe road into France failing, and the stock of money which the Duchess had provided beginning to give out, we were in great straits whither to go or what to do.

At this time of our need, however, Providence

opened a door in a quarter where we least looked for it. Letters came from Sigismund, the King of Poland, and from the Palatine of Wilna in that country, inviting the Duchess and Master Bertie to take up their residence there, and offering the latter an establishment and honourable employment. The overture was unlooked for, and was not accepted without misgivings, Wilna being so far distant, and there being none of our race in that country. However, assurance of the Polish king's good faith reached us—I say us, for in all their plans I was included—through John Alasco, a nobleman who had visited England. And in due time we started on this prodigious journey, and came safely to Wilna, where our reception was such as the letters had led us to expect.

I do not propose to set down here our adventures, though they were many, in that strange country of frozen marshes and endless plains; but to pass over eighteen months which I spent, not without profit to myself, in the Pole's service, seeing something of war in his Lithuanian campaigns, and learning much of men and the world, which here, to say nothing of wolves and bears, bore certain aspects not commonly visible in Warwickshire. I pass on to the early autumn of 1558, when a letter from the Duchess, who was at Wilna,

was brought to me at Cracovy. It was to this effect:—

“DEAR FRIEND,—Send you good speed! Word has come to us here of an enterprise England-wards, which promises, if it be truly reported to us, to so alter things at home that there may be room for us at our own firesides. Heaven so further it, both for our happiness and the good of the religion. Master Bertie has embarked on it, and I have taken upon myself to answer for your aid and counsel, which have never been wanting to us. Wherefore, dear friend, come, sparing neither horse nor spurs, nor anything which may bring you sooner to Wilna and your assured and loving friend,

“KATHERINE SUFFOLK.”

In five days after receiving this I was at Wilna; and two months later I saw England again, after an absence of three years. Early in November, 1558, Master Bertie and I landed at Lowestoft, in the county of Norfolk, having made the passage from Hamburg in a trading vessel of that place. We stopped only to sleep one night,

and then, dressed as travelling merchants, we set out on the road to London, entering the city without accident or hindrance on the third day after landing.

CHAPTER V.

THE WITCH'S WARNING.

"ONE minute!" I said. "That is the place."

Master Bertie turned in his saddle, and looked at it. The light was fading into the early dusk of a November evening, but the main features of four cross-streets, the angle between two of them occupied by the tall belfry of a church, were still to be made out. The east wind had driven loiterers indoors, and there was scarcely anyone abroad to notice us. I pointed to a dead wall ten paces down one street.

"Opposite that they stopped," I said. "There was a pile of boards leaning against it then."

"You have had many a worse bedchamber since, lad," he said, smiling.

"Many," I answered.

And then by a common impulse we shook up the horses, and trotting gently on were soon clear of London and making for Islington. Passing through the latter, we began to breast the steep

slope which leads to Highgate, and coming, when we had reached the summit, plump upon the lights of the village, pulled up in front of a building which loomed darkly across the road.

"This is the Gatehouse Tavern," Master Bertie said in a low voice. "We shall soon know whether we have come on a fool's errand—or worse!"

We rode under the archway into a great courtyard, from which the road issued again on the other side through a second gate. In one corner two men were littering down a line of packhorses by the light of lanterns which brought their tanned and rugged faces into relief. In another, where the light poured ruddily from an open doorway, an ostler was serving out fodder, and doing so, if we might judge from the travellers' remonstrances, with a niggardly hand. From the windows of the house a dozen rays of light shot athwart the darkness, and disclosed as many pigs wallowing asleep in the middle of the yard. In all we saw a coarse comfort and welcome. Master Bertie led the way across the yard, and accosted the ostler.

"Can we have stalls and beds?" he asked.

The man stayed his chaffering, and looked up at us.

"Every man to his business," he replied gruffly.

"Stalls, yes, but of beds I know nothing. For women's work go to the women."

"Right!" said I, "so we will. With better luck than you would go, I expect, my man!"

Bursting into a hoarse laugh at this—he was lame and one-eyed and not very well-favoured—he led us into a long, many-stalled stable, feebly lit by lanterns which here and there glimmered against the walls.

"Suit yourselves," he said; "first come is first served here."

He seemed an ill-conditioned fellow, but the business-like way in which we went about our work, watering, feeding, and littering down in old campaigners' fashion, drew from him a grunt of commendation.

"Have you come from far, masters?" he asked.

"No, from London," I answered curtly. "We are two linendrapers from Westcheap, if you want to know."

"Ay, I see that," he said, chuckling. "Never were atop of a horse before, nor handled anything but a clothyard—oh, no!"

"We want a merchant reputed to sell French lace," I continued, looking hard at him. "Do you happen to know if there is a dealer here with any?"

He nodded, rather to himself than to me, as if he had expected the question. Then in the same tone, but with a quick glance of intelligence, he answered:

"I will show you into the house presently, and you can see for yourselves. A stable is no place for French lace." He pointed with a wink over his shoulder towards a stall in which a man, apparently drunk, lay snoring. "That is a fine toy!" he ran on carelessly, as I removed my dagger from the holster and concealed it under my cloak—"a fine plaything—for a linen-draper!"

"Peace, peace, man! and show us in," said Master Bertie impatiently.

With a shrug of his shoulders the man obeyed. Crossing the courtyard behind him, we entered the great kitchen, which, full of light and warmth and noise, presented just such a scene of comfort and bustle, of loud-talking, red-faced guests, and hurrying bare-armed servant-maids, as I remembered lighting upon at St. Albans three years back. But I had changed much since then, and seen much. The bailiff himself would hardly have recognised his old antagonist in the tall, heavily-cloaked stranger, whose assured air, acquired amid wild surroundings in a foreign land, gave him a look of age to which I could not fairly

lay claim. Master Bertie had assigned the lead to me, as being in less danger of recognition; and I followed the ostler towards the hearth without hesitation.

"Master Jenkin!" the man cried, with the same rough bluntness he had shown outside, "here are two travellers who want the lace-seller who was here to-day. Has he gone?"

"Who gone?" the host as loudly retorted.

"The lace merchant who came this morning."

"No; he is in No. 32," returned the landlord. "Will you sup first, gentlemen? or take a cup of anything to drink?"

We declined, and followed the ostler, who made no secret of our destination, telling those in our road to make way, as the gentlemen were for No. 32. One of the crowd, however, who seemed to be crossing from the lower end of the room, failed apparently to understand, and, interposing between us and our guide, brought me perforce to a halt.

"By your leave, good woman!" I said, and tried to pass round her.

But she foiled me with unexpected nimbleness; and I could not push her aside, she was so very old. Her gums were toothless, and her forehead was lined and wrinkled. About her eyes,

which under hideous red lids still shone with an evil gleam—a kind of reflection of a wicked past—a thousand crows' feet had gathered. A few wisps of grey hair struggled from under the handkerchief which covered her head. She was humpbacked, and stooped over a stick, and whether she saw my movement of repugnance, or not, her voice was harsh when she spoke.

“Young gentleman,” she croaked, “let me tell your fortune by the stars. A fortune for a groat, young gentleman!” she continued, peering up into my face and frustrating all my attempts to pass.

“Here is a groat,” I answered peevishly, “and for the fortune, I will hear it another day. So let us by!”

But she would not, and my companion, seeing that the attention of the room was being drawn to us, tried to pull me by her. I could not use force, however, and short of force there was no remedy. The ostler, indeed, would have interfered on our behalf, and returned to bid her, with a civility he had not bestowed on us, “give us passage.” But she swiftly turned her eyes on him in a sinister fashion, and he retreated with an oath and a pallid face, while those nearest to us—and half a dozen had crowded round—

drew back, and crossed themselves in haste almost ludicrous.

"Let me see your face, young gentleman," she persisted, with a hollow cough. "My eyes are not so clear as they were, or it is not your cloak and your flap-hat that would blind me."

Thinking it best to get rid of her, even at a slight risk—and the chance that among the travellers present there would be one able to recognise me was small indeed—I uncovered. She shot a piercing glance at my face, and looking down on the floor traced hurriedly a figure with her stick. She studied the phantom lines a moment, and then looked up.

"Listen!" she said solemnly, and waving her stick round me she quavered out in tones which filled me with a strange tremor:

"The man goes east, and the wind blows west,
Wood to the head, and steel to the breast!
The man goes west, and the wind blows east,
The neck twice doomed the gallows shall feast!

"Beware!" she went on more loudly and harshly, tapping with her stick on the floor, and shaking her palsied head at me. "Beware, unlucky shoot of a crooked branch! Go no farther with it! Go back! The sword may miss or may not fall, but the cord is sure!"

If Master Bertie had not held my arm tightly, I should have recoiled, as most of those within hearing had already done. The strange allusions to my past, which I had no difficulty in detecting, and the witch's knowledge of the risks of our present enterprise, were enough to startle and shake the most constant mind; and in the midst of enterprises secret and dangerous, few minds are so firm or so reckless, as to disdain omens. That she was one of those unhappy beings who buy dark secrets at the expense of their souls, seemed certain; and had I been alone, I should have—I am not ashamed to say it—given back.

But I was lucky in having for my companion a man of rare mind, and, besides, of so single a religious belief that to the end of his life he always refused to put faith in a thing of the existence of which I have no doubt myself—I mean, witchcraft.

He showed at this moment the courage of his opinions.

“Peace, peace, woman!” he said compassionately. “We shall live while God wills it, and die when He wills it. And neither live longer nor die earlier! So let us by.”

“Would you perish?” she quavered.

"Ay! If so God wills," he answered, undaunted.

At that she seemed to shake all over, and hobbled aside, muttering:

"Then go on! Go on! God wills it!"

Master Bertie gave me no time for hesitation, but, holding my arm, urged me on to where the ostler stood awaiting the event with a face of much discomposure. He opened the door for us, however, and led the way up a narrow and not too clean staircase. On the landing at the head of this he paused, and raised his lantern so as to cast the light on our faces.

"She has overlooked me, the old witch!" he said viciously; "I wish I had never meddled in this business."

"Man!" Master Bertie replied sternly, "do you fear that weak old woman?"

"No; but I fear her master," retorted the ostler, "and that is the devil!"

"Then I do not," Master Bertie answered bravely. "For my Master is as good a match for him as I am for that old woman. When He wills it, man, you will die, and not before. So pluck up spirit."

Master Bertie did not look at me, though I needed his encouragement as much as the ostler,

having had better proofs of the woman's strange knowledge. But, seeing that his exhortation had emboldened this ignorant man, I was ashamed to seem to hesitate. When the ostler knocked at the door—not of 32, but of 15—and it presently opened, I went in without more ado.

The room was a bare inn-chamber. A pallet without coverings lay in one corner. In the middle were a couple of stools, and on one of them a taper in an iron stand.

The person who had opened to us stood eyeing us attentively: a bluff, weather-beaten man with a thick beard and the air of a sailor. "Well," he said, "what now?"

"These gentlemen want to buy some lace," the ostler explained.

"What lace do they want?" was the retort, grumpily delivered.

"French lace," I answered.

"You have come to the right shop, then," the man answered briskly, and with a complete change of manner. Nodding to our conductor to depart, he carefully let him out. Then barring the door behind him, he as rapidly strode to the pallet and twitched it aside, disclosing a trap-door. He lifted this, and we saw a narrow shaft descending into darkness. He brought the taper and held it

so as to throw a faint light into the opening. There was no ladder, but blocks of wood nailed alternately against two of the sides, at intervals of a couple of feet or so, made the descent pretty easy for an active man. "The door is on this side," he said, pointing out the one. "Knock loudly once, and softly twice. The word is the same."

We nodded, and while he held the taper above we descended, one by one, without much difficulty, though I admit that half-way down the old woman's words, "Go on and perish," came back disquietingly to my mind. However, my foot struck the bottom before I had time to digest them, and a streak of light which seemed to issue from under a door forced my thoughts the next moment into a new channel. Whispering to Master Bertie to pause a minute, for there was only room for one of us to stand at the bottom of the shaft, I knocked in the fashion prescribed.

The sound of loud voices, which I had already detected, ceased on a sudden, and I heard a shuffling on the other side of the boards. This was followed by silence, and then the door was flung open, and, blinded for the moment by a blaze of light, I walked mechanically forward into a room. I made out as I advanced a group of

men standing round a rude table, their figures thrown into dark relief by flares stuck in sconces on the walls behind them. Some had weapons in their hands, and others had partly risen from their seats and stood in postures of surprise. "What do you seek?" cried a threatening voice from among them.

"Lace," I answered boldly.

"What lace?"

"French lace."

"Then you are welcome—heartily welcome!" was the answer, given in a tone of relief. "But who comes with you?"

"Master Richard Bertie, of Lincolnshire," I answered promptly; and at that moment he emerged from the shaft.

A still more hearty murmur of welcome hailed his name and appearance, and we were borne forward to the table amid a chorus of voices, the greeting given to my companion being that of men who joyfully hail unlooked-for help. The room, from its vaulted ceiling and stone floor, and the stands of casks which lay here and there, or near the table served for seats, appeared to be a cellar. Its dark, gloomy recesses, the flaring lights, and the weapons on the table, seemed meet and fitting surroundings for the anxious faces which

were gathered about the board; for there was a something in the air which was not so much secrecy as a thing more unpleasant—suspicion and mistrust. Almost at the moment of our entrance it showed itself. One of the men, before the door had well closed behind us, went towards it, as if to go out. The leader—he who had questioned me—called sharply to him, bidding him come back. And he came back—but reluctantly, as it seemed to me.

I barely noticed this, for Master Bertie, who was known personally to many and by name to all, was introducing me to two who were apparently the leaders: Sir Thomas Penruddocke, a fair man as tall as myself, loose-limbed and untidily-dressed, with a reckless eye and a loud tongue; and Master Walter Kingston, a younger brother, I was told, of that Sir Anthony Kingston who had suffered death the year before for conspiracy against the Queen—the same in which Lord Devon had displayed the white feather. Kingston was a young man of moderate height and slender; of a brown complexion, and delicate, almost womanish beauty, his sleepy dark eyes and dainty moustache suggesting a temper rather amiable than firm. But the spirit of revenge had entered into him, and I presently learned that not even

Penruddocke, a Cornish knight of longer lineage than purse, was so vehement a plotter or so devoted to the cause. Looking at the others, my heart sank; it needed no greater experience than mine to discern that, except three or four whom I identified as stout professors of religion, they were men rather of desperate fortunes than good estate. I learned on the instant the lesson that conspiracy makes strange bedfellows; and that it is impossible to do dirty work, even with the purest intentions, in good company! Master Bertie's face indicated to one who knew him as well as I did, something of the same feeling; and could the clock have been put back awhile, and we placed with free hands and uncommitted outside the Gatehouse, I think we should with one accord have turned our backs on it, and given up an attempt which in this company could scarcely fare any way but ill. Still, for good or evil, the die was cast now, and retreat was out of the question.

We had confronted too many dangers during the last three years not to be able to face this one with a good courage; and presently Master Bertie, taking a seat, requested to be told of the strength and plans of our associates, his business-like manner introducing at once some degree of

order and method into a conference which before our arrival had—unless I was much mistaken—been conspicuously lacking in both.

“Our resources?” Penruddocke replied confidently to his question. “They lie everywhere, man! We have but to raise the flag, and the rest will be a triumphal march. The people, sick of burnings and torturings, and heated by the loss of Calais last January, will flock to us. Flock to us, do I say? I will answer for it they will!”

“But you have some engagements, some promises from people of standing?”

“Oh, yes! But the whole nation will join us. They are weary of the present state of things.”

“They may be as weary of it as you say,” Master Bertie answered shrewdly; “but is it equally certain that they will risk their necks to amend it? You have fixed upon some secure base from which we can act, and upon which, if necessary, we may fall back to concentrate our strength?”

“Fall back?” Penruddocke cried, rising from his seat in heat. “Master Bertie, I hope you have not come among us to talk of falling back! Let us have no talk of that. If Wyatt had held on

at once London would have been his! It was falling back ruined him."

Master Bertie shook his head. "If you have no secure base, you run the risk of being crushed in the first half hour," he said. "When a fire is first lighted the breeze puts it out, which afterwards but fans it."

"You will not say that when you hear our plans. There are to be three risings at once. Lord Delaware will rise in the west."

"But will he?" Master Bertie said pointedly, disregarding the threatening looks which were cast at him by more than one. "The late rebellion there was put down very summarily, and I should have thought that country-side would not be prone to rise again. *Will* Lord Delaware rise?"

"Oh yes, he will rise fast enough!" Penraddocke replied carelessly. "I will answer for him. And on the same day, while we do the London business, Sir Richard Bray will gather his men in Kent."

"Do not count on him!" said Master Bertie. "A prisoner, muffled and hoodwinked, was taken to the Tower by water this afternoon. And rumour says it was Sir Richard Bray."

There was a pause of consternation, during which one looked at another, and swarthy faces

grew pale. Penruddocke was the first to recover himself. "Bah!" he exclaimed, "a fig for rumour! She is ever a lying jade! I will bet a noble Richard Bray is supping in his own house at this minute."

"Then you would lose," Master Bertie rejoined sadly, and with no show of triumph. "On hearing the report I sent a messenger to Sir Richard's house. He brought word back that Sir Richard Bray had been fetched away unexpectedly by four men, and that the house was in confusion."

A murmur of dismay broke out at the lower end of the table. But the Cornishman rose to the situation. "What matter?" he cried boisterously. "What we have lost in Bray we have gained in Master Bertie. He will raise Lincolnshire for us, and the Duchess's tenants. There should be five hundred stout men of the latter, and two-thirds of them Protestants at heart. If Bray has been seized there is the more call for haste that we may release him."

This appeal was answered by an outburst of cries. One or two even rose, and waving their weapons swore a speedy vengeance. But Master Bertie sat silent until the noise had subsided. Then he spoke. "You must not count on them

either, Sir Thomas," he said firmly. "I cannot find it in my conscience to bring my wife's tenants into a plan so desperate as this appears to be. To appeal to the people generally is one thing; to call on those who are bound to us and who cannot in honour refuse is another. And I will not risk in a hopeless struggle the lives of men whose fathers looked for guidance to me and mine."

A silence, the silence of utter astonishment, fell upon the plotters round the table. In every face—and they were all turned upon my companion—I read rage and distrust and dismay. They had chafed under his cold criticisms and his calm reasonings. But this refusal went beyond all, and there were hands which stole instinctively to daggers, and eyes which waited scowling for a signal. But Penruddocke, sanguine by nature and rendered reckless by circumstances, had still the feelings of a gentleman, and something in him responded to the appeal which underlay Master Bertie's words. He remained silent, gazing gloomily at the table, his eyes perhaps opened at this late hour to the hopelessness of the attempt he meditated.

It was Walter Kingston who came to the fore,

and put into words the thoughts of the coarser and more selfish spirits round him. Leaping from his seat, he dashed his slender hand on the table. "What does this mean?" he sneered, a dangerous light in his dark eyes. "Those only are here or should be here who are willing to stake all—all, mind you—on the cause. Let us have no sneaks! Let us have no men with a foot on either bank! Let us have no Courtenays nor cowards! Such men ruined Wyatt and hanged my brother! A curse on them!" he cried, his voice rising almost to a scream.

"Master Kingston! do you refer to me?" Bertie rejoined in haughty surprise.

"Ay, I do!" cried the young man hotly.

"Then I must beg leave of these gentlemen to explain my position."

"Your position? So! More words?" quoth the other mockingly.

"Ay! as many words as I please," retorted Master Bertie, his colour rising. "Afterwards I will be as ready with deeds, I dare swear, as any other! My tenants and my wife's I will not draw into an almost hopeless struggle. But my own life and my friend's, since we have obtained your secrets, I must risk; and I will do so in honour to

the death. For the rest, who doubts my courage may test it below ground or above."

The young man laughed rudely. "You will risk your life but not your lands, Master Bertie? That is the position, is it?"

My companion was about to utter a rejoinder fierce for him, when I, who had hitherto sat silent, interposed. "The old witch told the truth," I cried bitterly. "She said if we came hither we should perish. And perish we shall, through being linked to a dozen men as brave as I could wish, but the biggest fools under heaven!"

"Fools?" shouted Kingston.

"Ay, fools!" I repeated. "For who but fools, being at sea in a boat in which all must sink or swim, would fall a-quarrelling? Tell me that!" I cried, slapping the table.

"You are about right," Penruddocke said, and half-a-dozen voices muttered assent.

"About right, is he?" shrieked Kingston. "But who knows we are in a boat together? Who knows that, I'd like to hear?"

"I do!" I said, standing up and overtopping him by eight inches. "And if any man hints that Master Bertie is here for any other purpose or with any other intent than to honestly risk his life

in this endeavour as becomes a gentleman, let him stand out—let him stand out, and I will break his neck! Fie, gentlemen, fie!” I continued, after a short pause which I did not make too long lest Master Kingston’s passion should get the better of his prudence. “Though I am young I have seen service. But I never saw battle won yet with dissension in the camp. For shame! Let us to business, and make the best dispositions we may.”

“You talk sense, Master Carey!” Penruddocke cried, with a great oath. “Give me your hand. And do you, Kingston, hold your peace. If Master Bertie will not raise his men to save his own skin, he will hardly do it for ours. Now, Sir Richard Bray being taken, what is to be done, my lads? Come, let us look to that.”

So the storm blew over for the time. But it was heavy hearts that two of us fell to the discussion which followed, counting over weapons and assigning posts, and debating this one’s fidelity and that one’s lukewarmness. Our first impressions had not deceived us. The plot was desperate, and those engaged in it were wanting in every element which should command success—in information, forethought, arrangement—everything save sheer audacity. When after a prolonged and

miserable sitting it was proposed that all should take the oath of association on the Gospels, Master Bertie and I assented gloomily. It would make our position no worse, for already we were fully committed. The position was indeed bad enough. We had only persuaded the others to a short delay; and even this meant that we must remain in hiding in England, exposed, from day to day, to all the chances of detection and treachery.

Sir Thomas brought out from some secret place about him a tiny roll of paper wrapped in a quill, and while we stood about him looking over his shoulders, he laboriously added, letter by letter, three or four names. The stern, anxious faces which peered the while at the document or scanned each other only to find their anxiety reflected in the eyes they met, the flaring lights behind us, the recklessness of some and the distrust of others, the cloaks in which many were wrapped to the chin, and the occasional gleam of hidden weapons, made up a scene very striking—the more as it was no mere show, but some of us saw only too distinctly behind it the figure of the headsman and the block. “Now,” said Penraddocke, who himself I think took a certain grim pleasure in the formality, “be ready to swear,

gentlemen, in pairs, as I call the names. Kingston and Matthewson!"

Lolling against the wall under one of the sconces, I looked at Master Bertie, expecting to be called up with him. He smiled as our eyes met; and I thought with a rush of tenderness how lightly I could have dared the worst had all my associates been like him. But repining came too late, and in a moment Penruddocke surprised me by calling out "Crewdson and Carey!"

So Master Bertie was not to be my companion! I learned afterwards that men who were strangers to one another were purposely associated, the theory being that each should keep an eye upon his oath-fellow. I went forward to the end of the table, and took the book.

There was a slight pause.

"Crewdson!" called Penruddocke sharply; "did you not hear, man?"

There was a little stir at the farther end of the room, and he came forward, moving slowly and reluctantly. I saw that he was the man whom Penruddocke had called back when we entered; a man of great height, though slender and closely cloaked. A drooping grey moustache covered his mouth, and that was almost all I

made out before Sir Thomas, with some sharpness, bade him uncover. He did so with an abrupt gesture, and reaching out his hand grasped the other end of the book, as though he would take it from me. His manner was so strange and abrupt, that I looked hard at him, and he, jerking up his head with a gesture of defiance, looked at me too, his face very pale.

I heard Penruddocke's voice droning the words of the oath, but I paid no attention to them, I was busied with something else. Where had I seen the sinister gleam in those eyes before, and that forehead high and narrow, and those lean, swarthy cheeks? Where had I before confronted that very face which now glared into mine across the book? Its look was bold and defiant, but low down in the cheek I saw a little pulse beating furiously, a pulse which told of anxiety, and the jaws, half veiled by the ragged moustache, were set in an iron grip. Where? Ha! I knew. I dropped my end of the book and stepped back.

"Look to the door!" I cried, my voice sounding harsh and strange in my own ears. "Let no one leave! I denounce that man." And raising my hand I pointed pitilessly at my oath-fellow. "I denounce him—he is a spy and traitor!"

"I a spy?" the man shouted fiercely—with the fierceness of despair.

"Ay, you! you! Clarence, or Crewdson, or whatever you call yourself, I denounce you! My time has come!"

CHAPTER VI.

FERDINAND CLUDDE.

THE bitterness of that hour long past, when he had left me for death, when he had played with the human longing for life, and striven without a thought of pity to corrupt me by hopes and fears the most awful that mortals know, was in my voice as I spoke. I rejoiced that vengeance had come upon him at last, and that I was its instrument. I saw the pallor of a great fear creep into his dark cheek, and read in his eyes the vicious passion of a wild beast trapped, and felt no pity.

“Master Clarence!” I said, and laughed—laughed mockingly. “You do not look pleased to see your friends. Or perhaps you do not remember me. Stand forward, Master Bertie. Maybe he will recognise you.”

But though Master Bertie came forward and stood by my side gazing at him, the villain’s eyes did not for an instant shift from mine.

"It is the man!" my companion said after a solemn pause—for the other, breathing fast, made no answer. "He was a spy in the pay of Bishop Gardiner, when I knew him. At the Bishop's death I heard that he passed into the service of the Spanish Ambassador, the Count de Feria. He called himself at that time Clarence. I recognise him."

The quiet words had their effect. From full one half of the savage crew round us a fierce murmur rose more terrible than any loud outcry. Yet this seemed a relief to the doomed man; he forced himself to look away from me, and to confront the dark ring of menacing faces which hemmed him in. The moment he did so he appeared to find courage and words.

"They take me for another man!" he cried in hoarse accents. "I know nothing of them!" and he added a fearful oath. "He knows me. Ask him!"

He pointed to Walter Kingston, who was sitting moodily on the stand of a cask outside the ring, and who alone had not risen under the excitement of my challenge. On being thus appealed to, he looked up suddenly.

"If I am to choose between you," he said

bitterly, "and say which is the true man, I know which I shall pick."

"Which?" Clarence murmured, "Which?" This time his tone was different. In his voice was the ring of hope.

"I should give my vote for you," Kingston replied, looking contemptuously at him. "I know something about you, but of the other gentleman I know nothing!"

"And not much of the person you call Crewdson," I retorted fiercely, "since you do not know his real name."

"I know this much," the young man answered, tapping his boot with his scabbard with studied carelessness, "that he lent me some money, and seemed a good fellow and one that hated a mass priest. That is enough for me. As for his name, it is his fancy perhaps. You call yourself Carey. Well, I know a good many Careys, but I do not know you, nor ever heard of you!"

I swung round on him with a hot cheek. But the challenge which was upon my tongue was anticipated by Master Bertie, who drew me forcibly back.

"Leave this to me, Francis," he said, "and do you watch that man. Master Kingston and gentlemen," he continued, turning again to them,

and drawing himself to his full height as he addressed them, "listen, if you please. You know me if you do not know my friend. The honour of Richard Bertie has never been challenged until to-night, nor ever will be with impunity. Leave my friend out of the question and put me in it. I, Richard Bertie, say that that man is a paid spy and informer, come here in quest of blood-money! And he, Crewdson, a nameless man, says that I lie. Choose between us. Or look at him, and judge! Look!"

He was right to bid them look. As the savage murmur rose again and took from the wretched man his last hope, as the ugliness of despair and wicked, impotent passion distorted his face, he was indeed the most deadly witness against himself.

The lights which shone on treacherous weapons half hidden, or on the glittering eyes of cruel men whose blood was roused, fell on nothing so dangerous as the livid, despairing face, which, unmasked, and eyed by all with aversion, still defied us. Traitor and spy as he was, he had the merit of courage at least; he would die game. And even as I, with a first feeling of pity for him, discerned this, his sword was out, and with a curse he lunged at me.

Penruddocke saved me by a buffet which sent me reeling against the wall, so that the villain's thrust was spent on air. Before he could repeat it, four or five men flung themselves upon him from behind. For a moment there was a great uproar, while the group surrounding him swayed to and fro as he dragged his captors up and down with a strength I should not have expected. But the end was certain, and we stood looking on quietly. In a minute or two they had him down, and disarming him, bound his hands.

For me he seemed to have a special hatred.

"Curse you!" he panted, glaring at me as he lay helpless. "You have been my evil angel! From the first day I saw you you have thwarted me in every plan, and now you have brought me to this!"

"Not I, but yourself," I answered.

"My curse upon you!" he cried again, the rage and hate in his face so terrible that I turned away shuddering and sick at heart. "If I could have killed you," he cried, "I would have died contented."

"Enough!" interposed Penruddocke, briskly. "It is well for us that Master Bertie and his friend came here to-night. Heaven grant it be not too

late! We do not need," he added, looking round, "any more evidence, I think?"

The dissent was loud, and, save for Kingston, who still sat sulking apart, unanimous.

"Death?" said the Cornishman, quietly.

No one spoke, but each man gave a brief stern nod.

"Very well," the leader continued; "then I propose——"

"One moment," said Master Bertie, interrupting him. "A word with you apart, with our friends' permission. You can repeat it to them afterwards."

He drew Sir Thomas aside, and they retired into the corner by the door, where they stood talking in whispers. I had small reason to feel sympathy for the man, who lay there tied and doomed to die like a calf. Yet even I shuddered—yes, and some of the hardened men round me shuddered also at the awful expression in his eyes as, without moving his head, he followed the motions of the two by the door. Some faint hope springing into being wrung his soul, and brought the perspiration in great drops to his forehead. I turned away, thinking gravely of the early morning three years ago when he had tortured me by

the very same hopes and fears which now racked his own spirit.

Penruddocke came back, Master Bertie following him.

"It must not be done to-night," he announced quietly, with a nod which meant that he would explain the reason afterwards. "We will meet again, to-morrow at four in the afternoon instead of at eight in the evening. Until then two must remain on guard with him. It is right he should have some time to repent, and he shall have it."

This did not at once find favour.

"Why not run him through now," said one, bluntly, "and meet to-morrow at some place unknown to him? If we come here again we shall, likely enough, walk straight into the trap."

"Well, have it that way, if you please," answered Sir Thomas, shrugging his shoulders. "But do not blame me afterwards if you find we have let slip a golden opportunity. Be fools if you like. I dare say it will not make much difference in the end!"

He spoke at random, but he knew how to deal with his crew, it seemed, for on this those who had objected assented reluctantly to the course he proposed.

"Barnes and Walters are here in hiding, so

they had better be the two to guard him," he continued. "There is no fear that they will be inclined to let him go!" I looked at the men whom the glances of their fellows singled out, and found them to belong to the little knot of fanatics I had before remarked: dark, stern men, worth, if the matter ever came to fighting, all the rest of the band put together.

"At four to-morrow, then, we meet," Sir Thomas concluded lightly. "Then we will deal with him, never fear! Now it is near midnight, and we must be going. But not all together, or we shall attract attention."

Half an hour later Master Bertie and I rode softly out of the courtyard and turned our faces towards the city. The night wind came sweeping across the valley of the Thames, and met us full in the face as we reached the brow of the hill. It seemed laden with melancholy whispers. The wretched enterprise, ill-conceived, ill-ordered, and in its very nature desperate, to which we were in honour committed, would have accounted of itself for any degree of foreboding. But the scene through which we had just passed, and on my part the knowledge that I had given up a fellow-being to death, had their depressing influences.

For some distance we rode in silence, which I was the first to break.

"Why did you put off his punishment?" I asked.

"Because I think he will give us information in the interval," Bertie answered briefly. "Information which may help us. A spy is generally ready to betray his own side upon occasion."

"And you will spare him if he does?" I asked. It seemed to me neither justice nor mercy.

"No," he said, "there is no fear of that. Those who go with ropes round their necks know no mercy. But drowning men will catch at straws; and ten to one he will babble."

I shivered. "It is a bad business," I said.

He thought I referred to the conspiracy, and he inveighed bitterly against it, reproaching himself for bringing me into it, and for his folly in believing the rosy accounts of men who had all to win, and nothing save their worthless lives to lose. "There is only one thing gained," he said. "We are likely to pay dearly for that, so we may think the more of it. We have been the means of punishing a villain."

"Yes," I said, "that is true. It was a strange meeting and a strange recognition. Strangest of all that I should be called up to swear with him."

"Not strange," Master Bertie answered gravely. "I would rather call it providential. Let us think of that, and be of better courage, friend. We have been used; we shall not be cast away before our time."

I looked back. For some minutes I had thought I heard behind us a light footstep, more like the pattering of a dog than anything else. I could see nothing, but that was not wonderful, for the moon was young and the sky overcast. "Do you hear some one following us?" I said.

Master Bertie drew rein suddenly, and turning in the saddle we listened. For a second I thought I still heard the sound. The next it ceased, and only the wind toying with the November leaves and sighing away in the distance came to our ears. "No," he said, "I think it must have been your fancy. I hear nothing."

But when we rode on the sound began again, though at first more faintly, as if our follower had learned prudence and fallen farther behind. "Do not stop, but listen!" I said softly. "Cannot you hear the pattering of a naked foot now?"

"I hear something," he answered. "I am afraid you are right, and that we are followed."

"What is to be done?" I said, my thoughts busy.

"There is Caen wood in front," he answered, "with a little open ground on this side of it. We will ride under the trees and then stop suddenly. Perhaps we shall be able to distinguish him as he crosses the open behind us."

We made the experiment; but as if our follower had divined the plan, his footsteps ceased to sound before we had stopped our horses. He had fallen farther behind. "We might ride quickly back," I suggested, "and surprise him."

"It would be useless," Bertie answered. "There is too much cover close to the road. Let us rather trot on and outstrip him."

We did trot on; and what with the tramp of our horses as they swung along the road, and the sharp passage of the wind by our ears, we heard no more of the footstep behind. But when we presently pulled up to breathe our horses—or rather within a few minutes of our doing so—there it was behind us nearer and louder than before. I shivered as I listened; and presently, acting on a sudden impulse, I wheeled my horse round and spurred him back a dozen paces along the road.

I pulled up.

There was a movement in the shadow of the trees on my right, and I leaned forward, peering

in that direction. Gradually I made out the lines of a figure standing still as though gazing at me—a strange, distorted figure, crooked, short, and in some way, though no lineament of the face was visible, expressive of a strange and weird malevolence. It was the witch!—the witch whom I had seen in the kitchen at the Gatehouse. How, then, had she come hither? How had she, old, lame, and decrepit, kept up with us?

I trembled as she raised her hand, and, standing otherwise motionless, pointed at me out of the gloom. The horse under me was trembling too, trembling violently, with its ears laid back, and, as she moved, its terror increased, and it plunged wildly. I had to give for a moment all my attention to it, and though I tried, in mere revolt against the fear which I felt was overcoming me, to urge it nearer, my efforts were vain. After nearly unseating me, the beast whirled round, and, getting the better of me, galloped down the road towards London.

“What is it?” cried Master Bertie, as I came speedily up with him: he had ridden slowly on. “What is the matter?”

“Something in the hedge startled it,” I explained, trying to soothe the horse. “I could not clearly see what it was.”

"A rabbit, I dare say," he remarked, deceived by my manner.

"Perhaps it was," I answered. Some impulse, not unnatural, led me to say nothing about what I had seen. I was not quite sure that my eyes had not deceived me. I feared his ridicule, too, though he was not very prone to ridicule. And above all I shrank from explaining the medley of superstitious fear, distrust, and abhorrence, in which I held the creature who had shown so strange a knowledge of my life.

We were already near Holborn, and reaching without further adventure a modest inn near the Bars, we retired to a room we had engaged, and lay down with none of the gallant hopes which had last night formed the subject of our talk. Yet we slept well, for depression goes better with sleep than does the tumult of anticipation; and I was up early, and down in the yard looking to the horses before London was well awake. As I entered the stable a man lying curled up in the straw rolled lazily over and, shading his eyes, glanced up. Apparently he recognised me, for he got slowly to his feet. "Morning!" he said gruffly.

I stood staring at him, wondering if I had made a mistake.

"What are you doing here, my man?" I said sharply, when I had made certain I knew him, and that he was really the surly ostler from the Gatehouse tavern at Highgate. "Why did you come here? Why have you followed us?"

"Come about your business," he answered. "To give you that."

I took the note he held out to me. "From whom?" I said. "Who sent it by you?"

"Cannot tell," he replied, shaking his head.

"Cannot, or will not?" I retorted.

"Both," he said doggedly. "But there, if you want to know what sort of a kernel is in a nut, you don't shake the tree, master—you crack the nut."

I looked at the note he had given me. It was but a slip of paper folded thrice. The sender had not addressed, or sealed, or fastened it in any way; had taken no care either to ensure its reaching its destination or to prevent prying eyes seeing the contents. If one of our associates had sent it he had been guilty of the grossest carelessness. "You are sure it is for me?" I said.

"As sure as mortal can be," he answered. "Only that it was given me for a man, and not a mouse! You are not afraid, master?"

I was not; but he edged away as he spoke,

and looked with so much alarm at the scrap of paper that it was abundantly clear he was very much afraid himself, even while he derided me. I saw that if I had offered to return the note he would have backed out of the stable and gone off there and then as fast as his lame foot would let him. This puzzled me. However, I read the note. There was nothing in it to frighten me. Yet, as I read, the colour came into my face, for it contained one name to which I had long been a stranger.

“To Francis Cludde,” it ran. “If you would not do a thing of which you will miserably repent all your life, and which will stain you in the eyes of all Christian men, meet me two hours before noon at the cross street by St. Botolph’s where you first saw Mistress Bertram. And tell no one. Fail not to come. In Heaven’s name, fail not!”

The note had nothing to do with the conspiracy, then, on the face of it, mysterious as it was and mysteriously as it came. “Look here!” I said to the man. “Tell me who sent it, and I will give you a crown.”

“I would not tell you,” he answered stubbornly, “if you could make me King of England!

No, nor King of Spain too! You might rack me and you would not get it from me!"

His one eye glowed with so obstinate a resolve that I gave up the attempt to persuade him, and turned to examine the message itself. But here I fared no better. I did not know the handwriting, and there was no peculiarity in the paper. I was no wiser than before. "Are you to take back any answer?" I said.

"No," he replied, "the saints be thanked for the same! But you will bear me witness," he went on anxiously, "that I gave you the letter. You will not forget that, or say that you have not had it? But there!" he added to himself, as he turned away, speaking in a low voice, so that I barely caught the sense of the words, "what is the use? She will know!"

She will know! It had something to do with a woman then, even if a woman were not the writer. I went in to breakfast in two minds about going. I longed to tell Master Bertie and take his advice, though the unknown had enjoined me not to do so. But for the time I refrained, and explaining my absence of mind as well as I could, I presently stole away on some excuse or other, and started in good time, and on foot, into the city. I reached the rendezvous a quarter of an

hour before the time named, and strolling between the church and the baker's shop, tried to look as much like a chance passer-by as I could, keeping the while a wary look-out for any one who might turn out to be my correspondent.

The morning was cold and grey. A drizzling rain was falling. The passers were few, and the appearance of the streets, dirty and with littered kennels, was dreary indeed, I found it hard at once to keep myself warm and to avoid observation as I hung about. Ten o'clock had rung from more than one steeple, and I was beginning to think myself a fool for my pains, when a woman of middle height, slender and young in figure, but wearing a shabby brown cloak, and with her head muffled in a hood as though she had the toothache or dreaded the weather more than ordinary, turned the corner of the belfry and made straight towards me. She drew near, and seemed about to pass me without notice. But when abreast of me she glanced up suddenly, her eyes the only features I could see.

"Follow me to the church!" she murmured gently. And she swept on to the porch.

I obeyed reluctantly, very reluctantly, my feet seeming like lead. For I knew who she was. Though I had only seen her eyes I had recognised

them, and guessed already what her business with me was. She led the way resolutely to a quiet corner. The church was empty and still, with only the scent of incense in the air to tell of a recent service. It was no surprise to me when she turned abruptly, and, removing her hood, looked me in the face.

"What have you done with him?" she panted, laying her hand on my arm. "Speak! Tell me what you have done with him?"

The question, the very question I had foreseen! Yet I tried to fence with her. I said, "With whom?"

"With whom?" she repeated bitterly. "You know me! I am not so changed in three years that you do not recognise me?"

"No, I know you," I said.

There was a hectic flush on her cheeks, and it seemed to me that the dark hair was thinner on her thin temples than when I had seen her last. But the eyes were the same.

"Then why ask with whom?" she cried passionately. "What have you done with the man you call Clarence?"

"Done with him?" I said feebly.

"Ay, done with him? Come, speak and tell me!" she repeated in fierce accents, her hand

clutching my wrist, her eyes probing my face with merciless glances. "Have you killed him? Tell me!"

"Killed him, Mistress Anne?" I said sullenly. "No, I have not killed him."

"He is alive?" she cried.

"For all I know, he is alive."

She glared at me for some seconds to assure herself that I was telling the truth. Then she heaved a great sigh; her hands fell from my wrists, the colour faded out of her face, and she lowered her eyes. I glanced round with a momentary idea of escape—I so shrank from that which was to come. But before I had well entertained the notion she looked up, her face grown calm.

"Then what have you done with him?" she asked.

"I have done nothing with him," I answered.

She laughed—a mirthless laugh. "Bah!" she said, "do not tell me lies, Francis! That is your honour, I suppose—your honour to your friends down in the cellar there! Do you think that I do not know all about them? Shall I give you the list? He is a very dangerous conspirator is Sir Thomas Penruddocke, is he not? And that scented dandy Master Kingston! Or Crewdson—

tell me of him! Tell me of him, I say!" she exclaimed, with a sudden return from irony to a fierce eagerness, a breathless impatience. "Why did he not come up last night? What have you done with him?"

I shook my head, sick and trembling. How could I tell her?

"I see," she said. "You will not tell me. But you swear he is yet alive, Master Cludde? Good. Then you are holding him for a hostage? Is that it?" with a piercing glance at my face. "Or, you have condemned him, but for some reason the sentence has not been executed!" She drew a long, deep breath, for I fear my face betrayed me. "That is it, is it? Then there is still time."

She turned from me and looked towards the end of the aisle, where a dull red lamp hanging before the altar glowed feebly in the warm scented air. She seemed so to turn and so to look in thankfulness, as if the news she had learned were good instead of what it was. "What is the hour fixed?" she asked suddenly.

I shook my head.

"You will not tell me? Well, it matters not," she answered briskly. "He must be saved. Do you hear? He must be saved, Master Cludde. That is your business."

I shook my head.

"You think it is not?" she said. "Well, I can show you it is! Listen!"

She raised herself on a step of the font, and looked me harshly in the face. "If he be not given up to me safe and sound by sunset this evening, I will betray you all! All! I have the list here," she muttered sternly, touching her bosom. "You, Bertie, Penruddocke, Fleming, Barnes: all. All, do you hear? Give him up or you shall hang!"

"You would not do it!" I cried aghast, peering into her burning eyes.

"Would not do it? Fool!" she hissed. "If all the world but he had one head, I would cut it off to save his! He is my husband! Do you hear? He is my husband—my all! Do you think I have given up everything, friends and honour and safety, for him, to lose him now? No! You say I would not do it? Do you know what I have done? You have a scar there."

She touched me lightly on the breast. "I did it," she said, quietly.

"You?" I muttered.

"Yes, I, you blind fool! I did it," she answered. "You escaped then, and I was glad of

it, since the wound answered my purpose. But you will not escape again. The cord is surer."

Something in her last words crossed my memory and enlightened me.

"You were the woman I saw last night," I said. "You followed us from Highgate."

"What matter! What matter!" she exclaimed impatiently. "Better be footsore than heartsore. Will you do now what I want? Will you answer for his life?"

"I can do nothing without the others," I said.

"But the others know nothing," she answered. "They do not know their own danger. Where will you find them?"

"I shall find them," I replied resolutely. "And in any case I must consult Master Bertie. Will you come and see him?"

"And be locked up too?" she said sternly, and in a different tone. "No. It is you must do this, and you must answer for it, Francis Cludde. You, and no one else."

"I can do nothing by myself," I repeated.

"Ay, but you can—you must!" she retorted, "or Heaven's curse will be upon you! You think me mad to say that. Listen! Listen, fool! The

man whom you have betrayed, whom you have condemned, whom you have left to die, is not only my husband, wedded to me these three years, but your father—your father, Ferdinand Cludde!”

CHAPTER VII.

THE COMING QUEEN.

I STOOD glaring at her.

"You were a blind bat or you would have found it out for yourself," she continued scornfully. "A babe would have guessed it, knowing as much of your father as you did."

"Does he know himself?" I muttered hoarsely, looking anywhere but at her now. The shock had left me dull and confused. I did not doubt her word, rather I wondered, with her, that I had not found this out for myself. But the possibility of meeting my father in that wide world into which I had plunged to escape from the knowledge of his existence had never occurred to me. Had I thought of it, it would have seemed too unlikely; and though I might have seen in Gardiner a link between us, and so have identified him, the greatness of the Chancellor's transactions, and certain things about Clarence which had seemed, or would have seemed, had I ever taken the point

into consideration, at variance with my ideas of my father, had prevented me getting upon the track.

"Does he know that you are his son, do you mean?" she said. "No, he does not."

"You have not told him?"

"No," she answered with a slight shiver.

I understood. I comprehended that even to her the eagerness with which, being father and son, we had sought one another's lives during those days on the Rhine, had seemed so dreadful that she had concealed the truth from him.

"When did you learn it?" I asked, trembling too.

"I knew his right name before I ever saw you," she answered. "Yours I learned on the day I left you at Santon." Looking back I remembered the strange horror, then inexplicable, which she had betrayed; and I understood it. So it was that knowledge which had driven her from us! "What will you do now?" she said. "You will save him? You must save him! He is your father."

Save him? I shuddered at the thought that I had destroyed him! that I, his son, had denounced him! Save him! The perspiration sprang out in beads on my forehead. What was

I to do? If I could not save him I should live pitied by my friends, and loathed by my enemies.

"If it be possible," I muttered, "I will save him."

"You swear it?" she cried. Before I could answer she seized my arm and dragged me up the dim aisle until we stood together before the Figure and the Cross. The chimes above us rang eleven. A shaft of cold sunshine pierced a dusty window and, full of dancing motes, shot athwart the pillars.

"Swear!" she repeated with trembling eagerness, turning her eyes on mine, and raising her hand solemnly towards the Figure. "Swear by the Cross!"

"I swear," I said.

She dropped her hand. Her form seemed to shrink and grow less. Making a sign to me to go, she fell on her knees on the step, and drew her hood over her face. I walked away on tiptoe down the aisle; but glancing back from the door of the church I saw the small, solitary figure still kneeling in prayer. The sunshine had died away again. The dusty window was colourless. Only the red lamp glowed dully above her head. I seemed to see what the end would be, as I pushed aside the curtain, and slipped out into

the keen air. It was hers to pray. It was mine to act.

I lost no time, but on my return I could not find Master Bertie either in the public room or in the inn-yard, so I sought him in his bed-room, where I found him placidly reading a book, his patient waiting in striking contrast with the feverish anxiety which had taken hold of me. "What is it, lad?" he said, closing the volume and laying it down on my entrance. "You look disturbed?"

"I have seen Mistress Anne," I answered. He whistled softly, staring at me without a word. "She knows all," I continued.

"How much is all?" he asked after a pause.

"Our names—all our names, Penruddocke's, Kingston's, the others': our meeting-place, and that we hold Clarence a prisoner. She was that old woman whom we saw at the Gatehouse tavern last night."

He nodded, appearing neither greatly surprised nor greatly alarmed. "Does she intend to use her knowledge?" he said. "I suppose she does."

"Unless we let him go safe and unhurt before sunset."

"They will never consent to it," he answered, shaking his head.

"Then they will hang!" I cried fiercely.

He looked hard at me a moment, discerning something strange in the bitterness of my last words. "Come, lad," he said, "you have not told me all. What else have you learned?"

"How can I tell you?" I cried wildly, waving him off, and going to the lattice that my face might be hidden from him. "Heaven has cursed me!" I added, my voice breaking.

He came and laid his hand on my shoulder. "Heaven curses no one," he said. "Most of our curses we make for ourselves. What is it, lad?"

I covered my face with my hands. "He—he is my father!" I muttered. "Do you understand? Do you see what I have done? He is my father!"

Master Bertie uttered an exclamation of intense astonishment; then he said no more. But the pressure of his hand told me that he understood, that he felt with me, that he would help me. And that silent comprehension, that silent assurance, gave the sweetest comfort. "He must be allowed to go, then, for this time," he resumed gravely, after a pause in which I had had time to recover myself. "Yes, as you gave him up, it must be so. But there will be difficulties. You

must be strong and brave. The truth must be told. It is the only way."

I saw that it was, though I shrank exceedingly from the ordeal before me. Master Bertie advised, when I grew more calm, that we should be the first at the rendezvous, lest by some chance Penruddocke's orders should be anticipated; and accordingly, soon after two o'clock, we mounted, and set forth. I remarked that my companion looked very carefully to his arms, and, taking the hint, I followed his example.

It was a silent, melancholy, anxious ride. However successful we might be in rescuing my father—alas! that I should have to-day and always to call that man father—I could not escape the future before me. I had felt shame while he was but a name to me; how could I endure to live, with his infamy always before my eyes? Petronilla, of whom I had been thinking so much since I returned to England, whose knot of velvet had never left my breast, nor her gentle face my heart—how could I go back to her now? I had thought my father dead, and his name and fame old tales. But the years of foreign life which yesterday had seemed a sufficient barrier between his past and myself—of what use were they now?

Or the foreign service I had fondly regarded as a kind of purification?

Master Bertie broke in on my reverie much as if he had followed its course. "Understand one thing, lad!" he said, laying his hand on the withers of my horse. "Yours must not be the hand to punish your father. But after to-day you will owe him no duty. You will part from him to-day and he will be a stranger to you. He deserted you when you were a child; and if you owe reverence to any one, it is to your uncle and not to him. He has himself severed the ties between you."

"Yes," I said. "I will go abroad. I will go back to Wilna."

"If ill comes of our enterprise—as I fear ill will come—we will both go back, if we can," he answered. "If good by any chance should come of it, then you shall be my brother; our family shall be your family. The Duchess is rich enough," he added with a smile, "to allow you a younger brother's portion."

I could not answer him as I desired, for we passed at that moment under the archway, and became instantly involved in the bustle going forward in the courtyard. Near the principal door of the inn stood eight or nine horses gaily

caparisoned and in the charge of three foreign-looking men, who, lounging in their saddles, were passing a jug from hand to hand. They turned as we rode in and looked at us curiously, but not with any impertinence. Apparently they were waiting for the rest of their party who were inside the house. Civilly disposed as they seemed, the fact that they were armed, and wore rich liveries of black and gold, caused me, and I think both of us, a momentary alarm.

"Who are they?" Master Bertie asked in a low voice as he rode to the opposite door and dismounted with his back to them.

"They are Spaniards, I fancy," I said, scanning them over the shoulders of my horse as I too got off. "Old friends, so to speak."

"They seem wonderfully subdued for them," he answered, "and on their best behaviour. If half the tales we heard this morning be true, they are not wont to carry themselves like this."

Yet they certainly were Spanish, for I overheard them speaking to one another in that language; and before we had well dismounted, their leader, whom they received with great respect, one of them jumping down to hold his stirrup, came out with three or four more and got to horse again. Turning his rein to lead the

way out through the north gate he passed near us, and, as he settled himself in his saddle, took a good look at us. The look passed harmlessly over me, but reaching Master Bertie dwelt on him for a while. The rider started and smiled faintly. He seemed to pause, then he raised his plumed cap and bowed low—covered himself again and rode on. His train all followed his example and saluted us as they passed.

Master Bertie's face, which had flushed a fiery red under the other's gaze, grew pale again. He looked at me when they had gone by with startled eyes.

"Do you know who that was?" he said, speaking like one who had received a blow, and did not yet know how much he was hurt.

"No," I said.

"It was the Count de Feria, the Spanish Ambassador," he answered. "And he recognised me. I met him often, years ago. I knew him again as soon as he came out, but I did not think he could by any chance recognise me in this dress."

"Are you sure," I asked in amazement, "that it was he?"

"Quite sure," he answered.

"But why did he not have you arrested, or

at least detained? The warrants are still out against you."

Master Bertie shook his head. "I cannot tell," he said darkly. "He is a Spaniard. But come, we have the less time to lose. We must join our friends and take their advice; we seem to be surrounded by pitfalls."

At this moment the lame ostler came up, and grumbling at us as if he had never seen us in his life before, and never wished to see us again, took our horses. We went into the kitchen, and seizing the first chance of slipping upstairs to No. 15, were admitted with the same precautions as before, and, descending the shaft, gained the cellar.

Here we were not, as we had looked to be, the first on the scene. I suppose a sense of the insecurity of our meeting-place had led every one to come early, so as to be gone early. Penruddocke indeed was not here yet, but Kingston and half a score of others were sitting about conversing in low tones. It was plain that the distrust and suspicion which we had remarked on the previous day had not been allayed by the discovery of Clarence's treachery.

Indeed, it appeared that the distrust and despondency had to-day become a panic. Men

glared at one another and at the door, and talked in whispers and started at the slightest sound. I glanced round. The one I sought for with eager yet shrinking eyes was not to be seen. I turned to Master Bertie, my face mutely calling on him to ask the question. "Where is the prisoner?" he said sharply.

A moment I hung in suspense. Then one of the men said, "He is in there. He is safe enough!" He pointed, as he spoke, to a door which seemed to lead to an inner cellar.

"Right, said Master Bertie, still standing. "I have two pieces of bad news for you nevertheless. Firstly, I have just been recognised by the Spanish Ambassador, whom I met in the courtyard above."

Half the men rose to their feet. "What is he doing here?" they cried, one boldly, the others with the quaver very plain in their voices.

"I do not know; but he recognised me. Why he took no steps to detain or arrest me I cannot tell. He rode away by the north road."

They gazed at one another and we at them. The wolfish look which fear brings into some faces grew stronger in theirs.

"What is your other bad news?" said Kingston, with an oath.

"A person outside, a friend of the prisoner,

has a list of our names, and knows our meeting-place and our plans. She threatens to use the knowledge unless the man Clarence or Crewdson be set free."

There was a loud murmur of wrath and dismay, amid which Kingston alone preserved his composure. "We might have been prepared for that," he said quietly. "It is an old precaution of such folk. But how did you come to hear of it?"

"My friend here saw the messenger and heard the terms. The man must be set free by sunset."

"And what warranty have we that he will not go straight with his plans and his list to the Council?"

Master Bertie could not answer that; neither could I. We had no surety, and if we set him free could take none save his word. *His word!* Could even I ask them to accept that?—to stake the life of the meanest of them on it?

I saw the difficulties of the position, and when Master Kingston pronounced coolly that this was a waste of time, and that the only wise course was to dispose of the principal witness, both in the interests of justice and our own safety, and then shift for ourselves before the storm broke, I

acknowledged, in my heart, the wisdom of the course and felt that yesterday it would have received my assent.

"The risk is about the same either way," Master Bertie said.

"Not at all," Kingston objected, a sparkle of malice in his eye. Last night we had thwarted him. To-night it was his turn; and the dark lowering looks of those round him showed that the majority were with him. "This fellow can hang us all. His accomplice who escapes can know nothing save through him, and could give only vague and uncertain evidence. No, no. Let us cast lots who shall do it, get it done quickly, and begone."

"We must wait at least," Bertie urged, "until Sir Thomas comes."

"No!" Kingston retorted, with heat. "We are all equal here. Besides, the man was condemned yesterday, with the full assent of all. It only remains to carry out the sentence. Surely this gentleman," he continued, turning suddenly upon me, "who was so ready to accuse him yesterday, does not wish him spared to-day?"

"I do wish it," I said, in a low tone.

"Ho! ho!" he cried, folding his arms and throwing back his head, astonished at the success

of his own question. "Then may we ask for your reasons, sir? Last night you could not lay your tongue to words too bad for him. To-night you wish to spare him, and let him go?"

"I do," I said. I felt that every eye was upon me, and that, Master Bertie excepted, not one there would feel sympathy with me in my humiliation. They were driven to the wall. They had no time for fine feeling, for sympathy, for appreciation of the tragic, unless it touched themselves. What chance had I with them, though I was a son pleading for a father? Nay, what argument had I, save that I was his son, and that I had brought him to this? No argument. Only the appeal to them that they would not make me a parricide! And I felt that at this they would mock.

In view of those stern, curious faces, a new temptation seized me—the temptation to be silent. Why should I not stand by and let things take their course? Why should I not spare myself the shame which I already saw would be fruitless? When Master Kingston, with a cynical bow, said. "Your reasons, sir?" I stood mute and trembling. If I kept silence, if I refused to give my reasons, if I did not acknowledge the prisoner, but merely begged his life, he would die, and the connection

between us would be known only to one or two, I should be freed from him and might go my own way. The sins of Ferdinand Cludde were well-nigh forgotten—why take to myself the sins of Clarence, which would otherwise never stain my name, would never be associated with my father or myself?

Why, indeed? It was a great and sore temptation, as I stood there before all those eyes. He had deserved death. I had given him up in perfect innocence. Had I any right to call on them to risk their lives that I might go harmless in conscience, and he in person? Had I——

Was there after all some taint in my blood? Was I going to become like him—to take to myself a shame of my own earning, in the effort to escape from the burden of his ill-fame? I remembered in time the oath I had sworn, and when Kingston repeated his question, I answered him quickly. “I did not know yesterday who he was,” I said. “I have discovered since that he is my father. I ask nothing on his account. Were he only my father I would not plead for him. I plead for myself,” I murmured. “If you show no pity, you make me a parricide.”

Well, I had done them wrong. There was something in my voice, I suppose, as I said the

words which cost me so much, which wrought with almost all of them in a degree. They gazed at me with awed, wondering faces, and murmured "His father!" in low tones. They were recalling the scene of last night, the moment when I had denounced him, the curse he had hurled at me, the half-told story of which that had seemed the climax. I had wronged them. They did see the tragedy of it.

Yes, and they pitied me; but they showed plainly that they would still do what perhaps I should have done in their place—justice. "He knows too much!" said one. "Our lives are as good as his," muttered another—the first to become thoroughly himself again—"why should we all die for him?" The wolfish glare came back fast to their eyes. They handled their weapons impatiently. They were longing to be away. At this moment, when I saw I had indeed made my confession in vain, Master Bertie struck in. "What," he said, "if Master Carey and I take charge of him, and, escorting him to his agent without, be answerable for both of them?"

"You would be only putting your necks into the noose!" said Kingston.

"We will risk that!" replied my friend—and what a friend and what a man he seemed amid

that ignoble crew!—"I will myself promise you that if he refuse to remain with us until midnight, or tries wherever we are to raise an alarm or communicate with any one, I will run him through with my own hand! Will not that satisfy you?"

"No," Master Kingston retorted, "it will not! A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush!"

"But the woman outside?" said one timidly.

"We must run that risk!" quoth he. "In an hour or two we shall be in hiding. Come, the lot must be drawn. For this gentleman, let him stand aside."

I leaned against the wall, dazed and horror-stricken. Now that I had identified myself with him I felt a great longing to save him. I scarcely noticed the group drawing pieces of paper at the table; my every thought was taken up with the low door over there, and the wretched man lying bound in the darkness behind it. What must be the horror, the black despair, the hate and defiance, of his mind as he lay there, trapped at last like any beast of prey? It was horrible! horrible!

I covered my face and could not restrain the cry of unutterable distress which rose to my lips. They looked round, two or three of them, from the table. But the impression my appeal had

made upon them had faded away already, and they only shrugged their shoulders and turned again to their task. Master Bertie alone stood apart, his arms folded, his face grave and dark. He, too, had abandoned hope.

There seemed no hope, when suddenly there came a knocking at the door. The papers were dropped, and while some stood as if stiffened into stone, others turned and gazed at their neighbours. It was a knocking more hasty and imperative than the usual summons, though given in the same fashion. At last a man found tongue. "It is Sir Thomas," he suggested, with a sigh of relief. "He is in a hurry and brings news. I know his knock."

"Then open the door, fool," cried Kingston. "If you can see through a two-inch plank, why do you stand there like a gaby?"

Master Bertie anticipated the man, and himself opened the door and admitted the knocker. Penruddocke it was; the knight came in, drumming on the door as he passed with his fist, his eyes sparkling, his ruddy cheeks aglow. He crossed the threshold with a swagger, and looking at us all, as we stood together, burst into a strange peal of laughter. "Yoicks! Gone to earth!" he shouted, waving his hand as if he had a whip in

it. "Gone to earth! Did you think it was the Lords of the Council, my lads?"

He had left the door wide open behind him, and we saw in the doorway the seafaring man who usually guarded the room above. "What does this mean, Sir Thomas?" Kingston said sternly. He thought, I fancy, as many of us did, that the knight was drunk. "Have you given that man permission to leave his post?"

"Post? There are no more posts," cried Sir Thomas, with a strange jollity. He certainly was drunk, but perhaps not with liquor. "Except good fat posts," he continued, smacking Master Bertie on the shoulder, "for loyal men who have done the State service, and risked their lives in evil times! Posts? I shall get so drunk to-night that the stoutest post on Ludgate will not hold me up!"

"You seem to have gone far that way already," my friend said coldly.

"So will you when you hear the news!" Penruddocke replied more soberly. "Lads, the Queen is dying!"

In the vaulted room his statement was received in silence: a silence dictated by no feeling for the woman going before her Maker — how should we, who were plotting against her, feel for

her, we who were, for the most part, homeless and proscribed through her?—but the silence of men in doubt, in doubt whether this might mean all that from Sir Thomas's aspect it seemed to mean.

“She cannot live a week!” Penruddocke continued. “The doctors have given up hope, and at the palace all is in confusion. She has named the Princess Elizabeth her successor, and even now Cecil is drawing up the proclamations. To show that the game is really up, the Count de Feria, the Spanish Ambassador, has gone this very day to Hatfield to pay his respects to the coming Queen.”

Then indeed the vaulted roof did ring—ring and ring again with shouts of “The Coming Queen!” Men over whom the wings of death had seemed a minute ago to be hovering, darkening all things to them, looked up and saw the sun. “The Coming Queen!” they cried.

“You need fear nothing!” continued Penruddocke. “No one will dare to execute the warrants. The Bishops are shaking in their mitres. Pole is said to be dying. Bonner is more likely to hang himself than burn others. Up and out and play the man! Away to your counties and get ready your tar-barrels! Now we will give

them a taste of the Cujus Regio! Ho! drawer, there! A cup of ale!”

He turned, and shouting a scrap of a song, swaggered back into the shaft and began to ascend. They all trooped after him, talking and laughing, a reckless, good-natured crew, looking to a man as if they had never known fear or selfishness—as if distrust were a thing impossible to them. Master Kingston alone, whom his losses had soured and who still brooded over his revenge, went off moodily.

I was for stopping one of them; but Master Bertie directed my eyes, by a gesture of his hand, to the door at the far end of the cellar, and I saw that the key was in the lock. He wrung my hand hard. “Tell him all,” he muttered. “I will wait above.”

CHAPTER VIII.

MY FATHER.

TELL him all? I stood thinking, my hand on the key. The voices of the rearmost of the conspirators sounded more and more faintly as they passed up the shaft, until their last accents died away in the room above, and silence followed—a silence in strange contrast with the bright glare of the torches which burned round me and lit up the empty cellar as for a feast. I was wondering what he would say when I told him all—when I said “I am your son! I, whom Providence has used to thwart your plans, whose life you sought, whom, without a thought of pity you left to perish!—I am your son!”

Infinitely I dreaded the moment when I should tell him this, and hear his answer; and I lingered with my hand on the key until an abrupt knocking on the other side of the door brought the blood to my face. Before I could turn the key the hasty summons was repeated, and grew to a

frantic, hurried drumming on the boards—a sound which plainly told of terror suddenly conceived, and in an instant full-grown. A hoarse cry followed, coming dully to my ears through the thickness of the door, and the next moment the stout planks shook as a heavy weight fell against them.

I turned the key, and the door was flung open from within. My father stumbled out.

The strong light for an instant blinded him, and he blinked as an owl does brought to the sunshine. Even in him the long hours passed in solitude and the blackness of despair had worked changes. His hair was greyer: in patches it was almost white, and then again dark. He had gnawed his lower lip, and there were bloodstains on it. His moustache, too, was ragged and torn, as if he had gnawed that also. His eyes were bloodshot; his lean face was white and haggard and fierce.

“Ha!” he cried, trembling, as he peered round, “I thought they had left me to starve! There were rats in there! I thought——”

He stopped. He saw me standing holding the edge of the door. He saw that otherwise the room was empty, the farther door which led to the shaft open too. An open door! To him

doubtless it seemed of all sights the most wonderful, the most heavenly! His knees began to shake under him.

"What is it?" he muttered. "What were they shouting about? I heard them shouting."

"The Queen is dying," I answered simply, "or dead, and you can do us no more harm. You are free."

"Free?" He repeated the word leaning against the wall, his eyes wild and glaring, his lips parted.

"Yes, free," I answered, in a lower voice—"free to go out into the air of heaven a living man!" I paused. For a moment I could not continue. Then I added solemnly, "Sir, Providence has saved you from death, and me from a great crime."

He leaned against the wall, dazed, thunder-struck, almost incredulous, and looked from me to the open door and back again, as if without this constant testimony of his eyes he could not believe in his escape.

"It was not Anne?" he murmured. "She did not——"

"She tried to save your life," I answered; "but they would not listen to her."

"Did she come here?"

As he spoke he straightened himself with an effort and stood up. He was growing more like himself.

"No," I answered. "She sent for me and told me her terms. But Kingston and the others would not listen to them. You would have been dead now, though I did all I could to save you, if Penruddocke had not brought this news of the Queen."

"She is dead?"

"She is dying. The Spanish Ambassador," I added, to clinch the matter, for I saw he doubted, "rode through here this afternoon to pay his court to the Princess Elizabeth at Hatfield."

He looked down at the ground, thinking deeply. Most men would have been unable to think at all, unable to concentrate their thoughts on anything save their escape from death. But a life of daily risk and hazard had so hardened this man that I was certain, as I watched him, that he was not praying nor giving thanks. He was already pondering how he might make the most out of the change; how he might to the best advantage sell his knowledge of the Government, whose hours were numbered, to the Government which soon would be. The life of intrigue had become second nature to him.

He looked up and our eyes met. We gazed at one another.

"Why are you here?" he said curiously. "Why did they leave you? Why were you the one to stop to set me free, Master Carey?"

"My name is not Carey," I answered.

"What is it then?" he asked carelessly, yet with some curiosity.

"Cludde," I answered softly.

"Cludde!" He called it out. Even his self-mastery could not cope with this surprise. "Cludde," he said again—said it twice in a lower voice.

"Yes, Cludde," I answered, meeting and yet shrinking from his questioning eyes; "my name is Cludde. So is yours. I tried to save your life, because I learned from Mistress Anne——"

I paused. I shrank from telling him that which, as it seemed to me, would strike him to the ground in shame and horror. But he had no fear.

"What?" he cried. "What did you learn?"

"That you are my father," I answered slowly. "I am Francis Cludde, the son whom you deserted many years ago, and to whom Sir Anthony gave a home at Coton."

I expected him to do anything except what he

did. He stared at me with astonished eyes for a minute, and then a low whistle issued from his lips.

"My son, are you? My son?" he said coolly. "That is a strange thing, now! And how long have you known this, young sir?"

"Since yesterday," I murmured. The words he had used on that morning at Santon, when he had bidden me die and rot, were fresh in my memory—in my memory, not in his. I recalled his treachery to the Duchess, his pursuit of us, his departure with Anne, the words in which he had cursed me. He remembered apparently none of these things, but simply gazed at me with a thoughtful smile.

"I wish I had known it before," he said at last. "Things might have been different. A pretty dutiful son you have been!"

The sneer did me good. It recalled to my mind what Master Bertie had said.

"There can be no question of duty between us," I answered firmly. "What duty I owe to anyone of my family, I owe to my uncle."

"Then why have you told me this?"

"Because I thought it right you should know it," I answered, "were it only that, knowing it, we may go different ways. We have nearly done

one another a mischief more than once," I added gravely.

He laughed. He was not one whit abashed by the discovery, nor awed, nor cast down. There was even in his cynical face a gleam of kindness and pride as he scanned me. We were almost of a height—I the taller now by an inch or two; and in our features I believe there was a likeness, though not such as to invite remark.

"You have grown to be a chip of the old block," he said coolly. "I would as soon have you for a son as another. I think, on the whole, I am pleased. You talked of Providence just now"—this with a laugh of serene amusement—"and perhaps you were right. Perhaps there is such a thing. For I am growing old, and lo! it gives me a son to take care of me."

I shook my head. I could never be that kind of son to him.

"Wait a bit," he said, frowning slightly. "You think your side is up and mine is down, and I can do you no good now, but only harm. You are ashamed of me. Well, wait," he continued, nodding confidently. "Do not be too sure that I cannot help you. I have been wrecked a dozen times, but I never yet failed to find a boat that would take me to shore."

He was so arrogant in the pride of his many deceits that, an hour after Heaven had stretched out its hand to save him, he denied its power and took the glory to himself. I did not know what to say to him, how to undeceive him, how to tell him that it was not the failure of his treachery which shamed me, but the treachery itself. I could only remain silent.

And so he mistook me; and after pondering a moment with his chin in his hand, he continued—

“I have a plan, my lad. The Queen dies. Well—I am no bigot—long live the Queen and the Protestant religion! The down will be up and the up down, and the Protestants will be everything. It will go hard then with those who cling to the old faith.”

He looked at me with a crafty smile, his head on one side.

“I do not understand,” I said coldly.

“Then listen. Sir Anthony will hold by his religion. He used to be a choleric gentleman, and as obstinate as a mule. He will need but to be pricked up a little, and he will get into trouble with the authorities as sure as eggs are eggs. I will answer for it. And then——”

"Well?" I said grimly. How was I to observe even a show of respect for him when I was quivering with fierce wrath and abhorrence? "Do you think that that will benefit *you*?" I cried. "Do you think that you are so high in favour with Cecil and the Protestants that they will set *you* in Sir Anthony's place? You!"

He looked at me still more craftily, not put out by my indignation, but rather amused by it.

"No, lad, not me," he replied, with tolerant good-nature. "I am somewhat blown upon of late. But Providence has not given me back my son for nothing. I am not alone in the world now. I must remember my family. I must think a little of others as well as of myself."

"What do you mean?" I said, recoiling.

He scanned me a moment with his eyes half-shut, his head on one side. Then he laughed a cynical, jarring laugh.

"Good boy!" he said. "Excellent boy! He knows no more than he is told. His hands are clean, and he has friends upon the winning side who will not see him lose a chance, should a chance turn up. Be satisfied. Keep your hands clean if you like, boy. We understand one another."

He laughed again and turned away; and, much as I dreaded and disliked him, there was something in the indomitable nature of the man which wrung from me a meed of admiration. Could the best of men have recovered more quickly from despair? Could the best of men, their plans failing, have begun to spin fresh webs with equal patience? Could the most courageous and faithful of those who have tried to work the world's bettering have faced the downfall of their hopes with stouter hearts, with more genuine resignation? Bad as he was, he had courage and endurance beyond the common.

He came back to me when he had gone a few paces.

"Do you know where my sword is?" he asked in a matter-of-fact tone, as one might ask a question of an old comrade.

I found it cast aside behind the door. He took it from me, grumbling over a nick in the edge, which he had caused by some desperate blow when he was seized. He fastened it on with an oath. I could not look at the sword without remembering how nearly he had taken my life with it. The recollection did not trouble him in the slightest.

"Now, farewell!" he said carelessly; "I am

going to turn over a new leaf, and begin returning good for evil. 'Do you go to your friends and do your work, and I will go to my friends and do mine.'

With a nod he walked briskly away, and I heard him climb the ladder and depart.

What was he going to do? I was so deeply amazed by his bearing, that I did not understand. I had thought him a wicked man, but I had not conceived the hardness of his nature. As I stood alone looking round the vault, I could hardly believe that I had met and spoken to my father, and told him I was his son—and this was all! I could hardly believe that he had gone away with this knowledge, unmoved and unrepentant; alike unwarned by the Providence which had used me to thwart his schemes, and untouched by the beneficence which had thrice held him back from the crime of killing me—ay, proof even against the long-suffering, which had plucked him from the abyss and given him one more chance of repentance.

I found Master Bertie in the stables waiting for me with some impatience. Of which, upon the whole, I was glad. For I had no wish to be closely questioned, and the account I gave him of

the interview might at another time have seemed disjointed and incoherent. He listened to it, however, without remark; and his next words made it clear that he had other matters in his mind.

"I do not know what to do about fetching the Duchess over," he said. "This news seems to be true, and she ought to be here."

"Certainly," I agreed.

"The country in general is well affected to the Princess Elizabeth," he continued. "Yet the interest of the Bishops, and of the Spanish faction, and of some of the Council, will lie in giving trouble. To avoid this, we should show our strength. For this reason I want the Duchess to come over with all speed. Will you fetch her?" he added sharply, turning to me.

"Will I?" I cried in surprise.

"Yes, you. I cannot well go myself at this crisis. Will you go instead?"

"Of course I will," I answered, "if you wish it."

And the prospect cheered me wonderfully. It gave me something to do, and opened my eyes to the great change of which Penruddocke had been the herald, a change which was even then beginning.

As we rode down Highgate Hill that day, messengers were speeding north and south and east and west, to Norwich and Bristol and Canterbury and Coventry and York, with the tidings that the sombre rule under which England had groaned for five years and more was coming to an end. If in a dozen towns of England they roped their bells afresh; if in every county, as Penruddocke had prophesied, they got their tar-barrels ready; if all, save a few old-fashioned folk and a few gloomy bigots and hysterical women, awoke as from an evil dream; if even sensible men saw in the coming of the young Queen a panacea for all their ills—a quenching of Smithfield fires, a Calais recovered, a cure for the worthless coinage which hampered trade, and a riddance of worthless foreigners who plundered it—with better roads, purer justice, a fuller Exchequer, more favourable seasons—if England read all this in that news of Pedruddocke's, was it not something to us also?

It was indeed. We were saved at the last moment from the dangerous enterprise on which we had rashly embarked. We had such prospects before us as only the success of that scheme could ordinarily have opened. Ease and honours instead of the gallows, and to lie warm instead of creaking in the wind! Thinking of this I fell into

a better frame of mind as I jogged along towards London. For what, after all, was my father to me, that his existence should make me unhappy, or rob mine of all pleasure? I had made a place for myself in the world. I had earned friends for myself. He might take away my pride in the one, but he could never rob me of the love of the others—of those who had eaten and drunk and fought and suffered beside me, and for whom I too had fought and suffered!

* * * * *

“A strange time for the swallows to come back,” said my lady, turning to smile at me, as I rode on her off-side.

It would have been strange, indeed, if there had been swallows in the air. For it was the end of December. The roads were frost-bound and the trees leafless. The east wind, gathering force in its rush across the Essex marshes, whirled before it the last trophies of Hainault Forest, and seemed, as it whistled by our ears and shaved our faces, to grudge us the shelter to which we were hastening. The long train behind us—for the good times of which we had talked so often had come—were full of the huge fire we expected to find at the inn at Barking—our last stage on the

road to London. And if the Duchess and I bore the cold more patiently, it was probably because we had more food for thought—and perhaps thicker raiment.

“Do not shake your head,” she continued, glancing at me with mischief in her eyes, “and flatter yourself you will not go back, but will go on making yourself and someone else unhappy. You will do nothing of the kind, Francis. Before the spring comes you and I will ride over the drawbridge at Coton End, or I am a Dutch-woman!”

“I cannot see that things are changed,” I said.

“Not changed?” she replied. “When you left, you were nobody. Now you are somebody, if it be only in having a sister with a dozen serving-men in her train. Leave it to me. And now, thank Heaven, we are here. I am so stiff and cold, you must lift me down. We have not to ride far after dinner, I hope.”

“Only seven miles,” I answered, as the host, who had been warned by an outrider to expect us, came running out with a tail at his heels.

“What news from London, Master Landlord?” I said to him as he led us through the kitchen,

where there was indeed a great fire, but no chimney, and so to a smaller room possessing both these luxuries. "Is all quiet?"

"Certainly, your worship," he replied, bowing and rubbing his hands. "There never was such an accession, nor more ale drunk, nor powder burned—and I have seen three—and there was pretty shouting at old King Harry's, but not like this. Such a fair young Queen, men report, with a look of the stout King about her, and as prudent and discreet as if she had changed heads with Sir William Cecil. God bless her, say I, and send her a wise husband!"

"And a loving one," quoth my lady prettily. "Amen."

"I am glad all has gone off well," I continued, speaking to the Duchess, as I turned to the blazing hearth. "If there had been blows, I would fain have been here to strike one."

"Nay, sir, not a finger has wagged against her," the landlord answered, kicking the logs together—"to speak of, that is, your worship. I do hear to-day of a little trouble down in Warwickshire. But it is no more than a storm in a wash-tub, I am told."

"In Warwickshire?" I said, arrested, in the act

of taking off my cloak, by the familiar name. "In what part, my man?"

"I am not clear about that, sir, not knowing the country," he replied. "But I heard that a gentleman there had fallen foul of her Grace's orders about Church matters, and beaten the officers sent to see them carried out; and that when the sheriff remonstrated with him, he beat him too. But I warrant they will soon bring him to his senses."

"Did you hear his name?" I asked.

For, as I listened there was a natural mis-giving in my mind.

Warwickshire was large; and yet something in the tale smacked of Sir Anthony.

"I did hear it," the host answered, scratching his head, "but I cannot call it to mind. I think I should know it if I heard it."

"Was it Sir Anthony Cludde?"

"It was that very same name!" he exclaimed, clapping his hands in wonder. "To be sure, your worship has it pat!"

I slipped back into my cloak again, and snatched up my hat and whip. But the Duchess was as quick. She stepped between me and the door.

"Sit down, Francis!" she said imperiously. "What would you be at?"

"What would I be at?" I cried with emotion. "I would be with my uncle. I shall take horse at once and ride Warwickshire way with all speed. It is possible that I may be in time to avert the consequences. At least, I can see that my cousin comes to no harm."

"Good lad," she said placidly. "You shall start to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" I cried impatiently. "But time is everything, madam!"

"You shall start to-morrow," she repeated. "Time is not everything, firebrand! If you start to-day, what can you do? Nothing! No more than if the thing had happened three years ago, before you met me. But to-morrow—when you have seen the Secretary of State, as I promise you you shall, this evening if he be in London—to-morrow you shall go in a different character, and with credentials."

"You will do this for me?" I exclaimed, leaping up and taking her hand, for I saw in a moment the wisdom of the course she proposed. "You will get me——"

"I will get you something to the purpose," my lady answered roundly. "Something that shall

save your uncle if there be any power in England can save him. You shall have it, Frank," she added, her colour rising, and her eyes filling, as I kissed her hand, "though I have to take Master Secretary by the beard!"

CHAPTER IX.

SIR ANTHONY'S PURPOSE.

LATE, as I have heard, on the afternoon of November the twentieth, 1558, a man riding between Oxford and Worcester, with the news of the Queen's death, caught sight of the gateway tower at Coton End, which is plainly visible from the road. Though he had already drunk that day as much ale as would have sufficed him for a week when the Queen was well, yet much wants more. He calculated he had time to stop and taste the Squire's brewing, which he judged, from the look of the tower, might be worth his news; and he rode through the gate and railed at his nag for stumbling.

Half-way across the Chase he met Sir Anthony. The old gentleman was walking out, with his staff in his hand and his dogs behind him, to take the air before supper. The man, while he was still a hundred paces off, began to wave his hat and shout something, which ale and excitement rendered unintelligible.

"What is the matter?" said Sir Anthony to himself. And he stood still.

"The Queen is dead!" shouted the messenger, swaying in his saddle.

The knight stared.

"Ay, sure!" he ejaculated after a while. And he took off his hat. "Is it true, man?"

"As true as that I left London yesterday afternoon, and have never drawn rein since!" swore the knave, who had been three days on the road, and had drunk at every hostel and at half the manor-houses between London and Oxford.

"God rest her soul!" said Sir Anthony piously, still in somewhat of a maze. "And do you come in! Come in, man, and take something."

But the messenger had got his formula by heart, and was not to be defrauded of any part of it.

"God save the Queen!" he shouted. And out of respect for the knight, he got down from his saddle, and promptly fell on his back in the road.

"Ay, to be sure, God save the Queen!" echoed Sir Anthony, taking off his hat again. "You are right, man!" Then he hurried on, not noticing the messenger's mishap. The tidings he

had heard seemed of such importance, and he was so anxious to tell them to his household—for the greatest men have weaknesses, and news such as this comes seldom in a lifetime—that he strode on to the house and over the draw-bridge into the courtyard, without once looking behind him.

He loved order and decent observance. But there are times when a cat, to get to the cream-pan, will wet its feet. He stood now in the middle of the courtyard, and raising his voice, shouted for his daughter. “Ho, Petronilla! do you hear, girl? Father! Father Carey! Martin Luther! Baldwin!” and so on, until half the household were collected. “Do you hear, all of you? The Queen is dead! God rest her soul!”

“Amen!” said Father Carey, as became him, putting in his word amid the wondering silence which followed; while Martin Luther and Baldwin, who were washing themselves at the pump, stood with their heads dripping and their mouths agape.

“Amen!” echoed the knight. “And long live the Queen! Long live Queen Elizabeth!” he continued, having now got his formula by heart. And he swung his hat.

There was a cheer, a good, loud, loyal cheer.

But there was one who did not join in it, and that was Petronilla. She, listening at her lattice upstairs, began at once to think, as was her habit, when any matter great or small fell out, whether this would affect the fortunes of a certain person far away. It might, it might not; she did not know. But the doubt so far entertained her that she came down to supper with a heightened colour, not thinking in the least, poor girl, that the event might have dire consequences for others almost as dear to her, and nearer home.

Every year since his sudden departure a letter from Francis Cludde had come to Coton: a meagre letter, which had passed through many hands, and reached Sir Anthony now through one channel, now through another. The knight grumbled and swore over these letters, which never contained an address to which an answer could be forwarded, nor said much, save that the writer was well and sent his love and duty, and looked to return, all being well. But, meagre as they were, and loud as he swore over them, he put them religiously away in an oak-chest in his parlour; and another always put away for her share something else, which was invariably enclosed—a tiny swallow's feather. The knight never said anything about the feather; neither asked the meaning of its pres-

ence, nor commented upon its absence, when Petronilla gave him back the letter. But for days after each of these arrivals he would look much at his daughter, would follow her about with his eyes, be more regular in bidding her attend him in his walk, and more particular in seeing that she had the tit-bits of the joint.

For Petronilla, it cannot be said, though I think in after times she would have liked to make some one believe it, that she wasted away. But she did take a more serious and thoughtful air in those days, which she never, God bless her! lost afterwards. There came from Wootton Wawen and from Henley in Arden and from Cookhill gentlemen of excellent estate to woo her. But they all went away disconsolate after drinking very deeply of Sir Anthony's ale and strong waters. And some wondered that the good knight did not roundly take the jade to task, and see her settled.

But he did not: so possibly even in those days he had other views. I have been told that, going up once to her little chamber to seek her, he found a very singular ornament suspended inside her lattice. It was no other than a common clay house-martin's nest. But it was so deftly

hung in a netted bag, and so daintily swathed in moss always green, and the Christmas roses and snowdrops and violets and daffodils which decked it in turn were always so pure and fresh and bright—as the knight learned by more than one stealthy visit afterwards—that, coming down the steep steps, he could not see clearly, and stumbled against a cook-boy, and beat him soundly for getting in his way.

To return, however. The news of the Queen's death had scarcely been well digested at Coton, nor the mass for her soul which Father Carey celebrated with much devotion been properly criticised, before another surprise fell upon the household. Two strangers arrived, riding late one evening, and rang the great bell while all were at supper. Baldwin and the porter went to see what it was, and brought back a message which drew the knight from his chair as a terrier draws a rat.

"You are drunk!" he shouted, purple in the face, and fumbling for the stick which usually leaned against his seat ready for emergencies. "How dare you bring cock-and-bull stories to me?"

"It is true enough!" Baldwin muttered sullenly:

a stout, dour man, not much afraid of his master, but loving him exceedingly. "I knew him again myself."

Sir Anthony strode firmly out of the room, and in the courtyard near the great gate found a man and a woman standing in the dusk. He walked up to the former and looked him in the face.

"What do you here?" he said, in a strange, hard voice.

"I want shelter for a night for myself and my wife; a meal and some words with you—no more," was the answer. "Give me this," the stranger continued, "which every idle passer-by may claim at Coton End—or could in my day—and you shall see no more of me, Anthony."

For a moment the knight seemed to hesitate. Then he answered, pointing sternly with his hand.

"There is the hall and supper. Go and eat and drink. Or, stay!" he resumed. And he turned and gave some order to Baldwin, who went swiftly to the hall, and in a moment came again. "Now go! What you want, the servants will prepare for you."

"I want speech of you," said the new-comer.

Sir Anthony seemed about to refuse, but thought better of it.

"You can come to my room when you have supped," he said, in the same ungracious tone, speaking with his eyes averted.

"And you—do you not take supper?"

"I have finished," said the knight, albeit he had eaten little. And he turned on his heel.

Very few of those who sat round the table, and watched, with astonishment, the tall stranger's entrance, knew him again. It was thirteen years since Ferdinand Cludde had last sat there; sitting there of right. And the thirteen years had worked much change in him. When he found that Petronilla, obeying her father's message, had disappeared, he said haughtily that his wife would sup in her room; and, with a flashing eye and curling lip, bade Baldwin see to it. Then, seating himself in a place next Sir Anthony's, he looked down the board, at which all sat silent. His sarcastic eye, his high bearing, his manner—the manner of one who had gone long with his life in his hand—awed these simple folk. Then, too, he was a Cludde. Father Carey was absent that evening. Martin Luther had one of those turns, half-sick, half-sullen, which alternated with his

moods of merriment, and kept his straw pallet in some corner or other. There was no one to come between the servants and this dark-visaged stranger, who was yet no stranger.

He had his way and his talk with Sir Anthony, the latter lasting far into the night and producing odd results. In the first place, the unbidden guest and his wife stayed on over next day, and over many days to come, and seemed gradually to grow more and more at home. The knight began to take long walks and rides with his brother, and from each walk and ride came back with a more gloomy face and a curter manner. Petronilla, his companion of old, found herself set aside for her uncle, and cast, for society, on Ferdinand's wife, the strange young woman with the brilliant eyes, whose odd changes from grave to gay rivalled Martin Luther's, and who now scared the girl by wild laughter and wilder gibes, and now moved her to pity by fits of weeping, or dark moods of gloom. That Uncle Ferdinand's wife stood in dread of her husband, Petronilla soon learned, and even began to share this dread, to shrink from his presence, and to shut herself up more and more closely in her own chamber.

There was another, too, who grew to be

troubled about this time, and that was Father Carey. The good-natured, easy priest received with joy and thankfulness the news that Ferdinand Cludde had seen his errors and re-entered the fold. But when he had had two or three interviews with the convert, his brow grew clouded, and his mind troubled. He learned to see that the accession of the young Protestant Queen must bear fruit for which he had a poor appetite. He began to spend many hours in the church—the church which he had known all his life—and wrestled much with himself—if his face were any index to his soul. Good, kindly man, he was not of the stuff of which martyrs are made; and to be forced, pushed on, and goaded into becoming a martyr against one's will—well, the Father's position was a hard one, as was that in those days of many a good and learned clergyman bred in one Church, and bidden suddenly, on pain of losing his livelihood, if not his life, to migrate to another.

The visitors had been in the house a month—and in that month an observant eye might have noted much change, though all things in seeming went on as before—when the Queen's orders enjoining all priests to read the service, or a great part of it, in English, came down, being

forwarded by the sheriff to Father Carey. The missive arrived on a Friday, and had been, indeed, long expected.

"What shall you do?" Ferdinand asked Sir Anthony.

"As before!" the tall old man replied, gripping his staff more firmly. It was no new subject between them. A hundred times they had discussed it already, even as they were now discussing it on the terrace by the fish-pool, with the church which adjoins the house full in view across the garden. "I will have no mushroom faith at Coton End," the knight continued warmly. "It sprang up under King Henry, and how long did it last? A year or two. It came in again under King Edward, and how long did it last? A year or two. So it will be again. It will not last, Ferdinand."

"I am of that mind," the younger man answered, nodding his head gravely.

"Of course you are!" Sir Anthony rejoined snappishly, as he rested one hand on the sundial. "For ten generations our forefathers have worshipped in that church after the old fashion—and shall it be changed in my day? Heaven forbid! The old fashion did for my fathers; it

shall do for me. Why, I would as soon expect that the river yonder should flow backwards as that the Church which has stood for centuries, and more years to the back of them than I can count, should be swept away by these Hot Gospellers! I will have none of them! I will have no new-fangled ways at Coton End!"

"Well, I think you are right!" the younger brother said. By what means he had brought the knight to this mind without committing himself more fully, I cannot tell. Yet so it was. Ferdinand showed himself always the cautious doubter. Father Carey even must have done him that justice. But—and this was strange—the more doubtful he showed himself, the more stubborn grew his brother. There are men so shrewd as to pass off stones for bread, and men so simple-minded as to take something less than the word for the deed.

"Why should it come in our time?" cried Sir Anthony fractiously, following up the old train of thought.

"Why, indeed?" quoth the subtle one.

"I say, why should it come now? I have heard and read of the sect called Lollards, who gave trouble a while ago. But they passed, and

the Church stood. So will these Gospellers pass, and the Church will stand."

"That is our experience, certainly," said Ferdinand.

"I hate change!" the old man continued, his eyes on the old church, the old timbered house—for only the gateway tower at Coton is of stone—the old yew-trees in the churchyard. "I do not believe in it, and, what is more, I will not have it. As my fathers have worshipped, so will I, though it cost me every rood of land! A fig for the Order in Council!"

"If you really will not change with the younger generation——"

"I will not!" replied the old knight, sharply. "I have said so. There is an end of it!"

To-day the Reformed Church in England has seen many an anniversary, and grown stronger with each year; and we can afford to laugh at Sir Anthony's arguments. We know better than he did, for the proof of the pudding is in the eating. But in him and his fellows, who had only the knowledge of their own day, such arguments were natural enough. All time, all experience, all history and custom and habit as known to them, were on their side; only it was

once again to be the battle of David and the Giant of Gath.

Sir Anthony had said, "There is an end of it!" But his companion, as he presently strolled up to the house, with a smile on his saturnine face, well knew that this was only the beginning of it. This was Friday.

On the Sunday, a rumour of the order having gone abroad, a larger congregation than usual streamed across the Chase to church, prepared to hear some new thing. They were disappointed. Sir Anthony stalked in as of old, through the double ranks of people waiting at the door to receive him; and after him Ferdinand and his wife, and Petronilla and Baldwin, and every servant from the house, save a cook or two and the porter. The church was full. Seldom had such a congregation been seen in it. But all passed as of old. Father Carey's hands shook, indeed, and his voice quavered; but he went through the ceremony of the mass, and all was done in Latin. A little change would have been pleasant, some thought. But no one in this country place on the borders of the forest held very strong views. No bishop had come heretic-hunting to Coton End. No abbey existed to excite dislike by its extra-

vagance or licence, or by the swarm of ragged idlers it supported. Father Carey was the most harmless and kindest of men. The villagers did not care one way or the other. To them Sir Anthony was king. And if anyone felt tempted to interfere, the old knight's face as he gazed steadfastly at the brass effigy of a Cludde, who had fallen in Spain fighting against the Moors, warned the meddler to be silent.

And so on that Sunday all went well. But some one must have told tales, for early in the week there came a strong letter of remonstrance from the sheriff, who was an old friend of Sir Anthony, and of his own free will, I fancy, would have winked. But he was committed to the Protestants, and bound to stand or fall with them. The choleric knight sent back an answer by the same messenger. The sheriff replied, the knight rejoined—having his brother always at his elbow. The upshot of the correspondence was an announcement on the part of the sheriff that he should send his officers to the next service, to see that the Queen's order was obeyed; and a reply on the part of Sir Anthony that he should as certainly put the men in the duck-pond. Some inkling of this state of things got abroad, and spread as a September fire flies through a wood;

so that there was like to be such a congregation at the next service to witness the trial of strength as would throw the last Sunday's gathering altogether into the shade.

It was clear at last that Sir Anthony himself did not think that here was the end of it. For on that Saturday afternoon he took a remarkable walk. He called Petronilla after dinner, and bade her get her hood and come with him. And the girl, who had seen little of her father in the last month, and who, what with rumours and fears and surmises, was eating her heart out, obeyed him with joy. It was a fine, frosty day near the close of December. Sir Anthony led the way over the plank-bridge which crossed the moat in the rear of the house, and tramped steadily through the home farm towards a hill called the Woodman's View, which marked the border of the forest. He did not talk, but neither was he sunk in reverie. As he entered each field he stood and scanned it, at times merely nodding, at times smiling, or again muttering a few words such as, "The three-acre piece! My father enclosed it!" or, "That is where Ferdinand killed the old mare!" or, "The best land for wheat on this side of the house!" The hill climbed, he stood a long time gazing over the landscape, eyeing first the fields

and meadows which stretched away from his feet towards the house; the latter, as seen from this point, losing all its stateliness in the mass of stacks and ricks and barns and granaries which surrounded it. Then his eyes travelled farther in the same line to the broad expanse of woodland—Coton Chase—through which the road passed along a ridge as straight as an arrow. To the right were more fields, and here and there amid them a homestead with its smaller ring of stacks and barns. When he turned to the left, his eyes, passing over the shoulders of Barnt Hill and Mill-Head Copse and Beacon Hill, all bulwarks of the forest, followed the streak of river as it wound away towards Stratford through luscious flood-meadows, here growing wide, and there narrow, as the woodland advanced or retreated.

“It is all mine,” he said, as much to himself as to the girl. “It is all Cludde land as far as you can see.”

There were tears in her eyes, and she had to turn away to conceal them. Why, she hardly knew. For he said nothing more, and he walked down the hill dry-eyed. But all the way home he still looked sharply about, noting this or that, as if he were bidding farewell to the old familiar objects, the spinneys and copses—ay, and the

very gates and gaps and the hollow trees where the owls built. It was the saddest and most pathetic walk the girl had ever taken. Yet there was nothing said.

CHAPTER X.

THE LAST MASS.

THE north wall of the church at Coton End is only four paces from the house, the church standing within the moat. Isolated as the sacred building, therefore, is from the outer world by the wide-spreading Chase, and close-massed with the homestead, Sir Anthony had some excuse for considering it as almost as much a part of his demesne as the mill or the smithy. In words he would have been willing to admit a distinction; but in thought I fancy he lumped it with the rest of his possessions.

It was with a lowering eye that on this Sunday morning he watched from his room over the gateway the unusual stream of people making for the church. Perchance he had in his mind other Sundays—Sundays when he had walked out at this hour, light of heart and kind of eye, with his staff in his fist and his glove dangling, and his dog at his heels; and, free from care, had taken

pleasure in each bonnet doffed and each old wife's "God bless ye, Sir Anthony!" Well, those days were gone. Now the rain dripped from the eaves—for a thaw had come in the night—and the bells, that could on occasion ring so cheerily, sounded sad and forlorn. His daughter, when she came, according to custom, bringing his great service-book, could scarcely look him in the face. I know not whether even then his resolution to dare all might not, at sound of a word from her, or at sight of her face, have melted like yesterday's ice. But before the word could be spoken, or the eyes meet, another step rang on the stone staircase, and brother Ferdinand entered.

"They are here!" he said in a low voice. "Six of them, Anthony, and sturdy fellows, as all Clopton's men are. If you do not think your people will stand by you——"

The knight fired at the suggestion. "What?" he burst out, turning from the window, "if Cludde men cannot meet Clopton men the times are indeed gone mad! Make way and let me come! Though the mass be never said again in Coton church, it shall be said to-day!" And he swore a great oath.

He strode down the stairs and under the gateway, where were arranged, according to the cus-

tom of the house on wet days, all the servants, with Baldwin and Martin Luther at their head. The knight stalked through them with a gloomy brow. His brother followed him, a faint smile flickering about the corners of his mouth. Then came Ferdinand's wife and Petronilla, the latter with her hood drawn close about her face, Anne with her chin in the air and her eyes aglow. "It is not a bit of a bustle will scare her!" Baldwin muttered, as he fell in behind her, and eyed her back with no great favour.

"No—so long as it does not touch her," Martin replied in a cynical whisper. "She is well-mated! Well-mated and ill-fated! Ha! ha!"

"Silence, fool!" growled his companion angrily. "Is this a time for antics?"

"Ay, it is!" Martin retorted swiftly, though with the same caution. "For when wise men turn fools, fools are put to it to act up to their profession. You see, brother?" And he deliberately cut a caper. His eyes were glittering, and the nerves on one side of his face twitched oddly. Baldwin looked at him, and muttered that Martin was going to have one of his mad fits, which had grown on the fool of late.

The knight reached the church porch and

passed through the crowd which awaited him there. Save for its unusual size and some strange faces to be seen on its skirts, there was no indication of trouble. He walked, tapping his stick on the pavement a little more loudly than usual, to his place in the front pew. The household, the villagers, the strangers, pressed in behind him until every seat was filled. Even the table monument of Sir Piers Cludde, which stood lengthwise in the aisle, was seized upon, and if the two similar monuments which stood to right and left below the chancel steps had not been under the knight's eyes, they too would have been invaded. Yet all was done decently and in order, with a clattering of rustic boots indeed, but no scrambling or ill words. The Clopton men were there. Baldwin had marked them well, and so had a dozen stout fellows, sons of Sir Anthony's tenants. But they behaved discreetly; and amid such a silence as Father Carey never remembered to have faced, he began the Roman service.

The December light fell faintly through the east window, shining on the Father at his ministrations, on his small acolytes, on the four Cludde brasses before the altar. It fell everywhere on grey, dusty walls, buttressed by grey tombs which left but a narrow space in the middle of the

chancel. The marble crusader to the left matched the canopied bed of Sir Anthony's parents on the right; the Abbess's tomb in the next row faced the plainer monument of Sir Anthony's wife, a vacant place by her side awaiting his own effigy. And there were others. The chancel was so small—nay, the church too—so small and old and grey and solid, and the tombs were so massive, that they elbowed one another. The very dust which rose as men stirred was the dust of Cluddes. Sir Anthony's brow relaxed. He listened gravely and sadly.

And then the interruption came. "I protest!" a rough voice in rear of the crowd cried suddenly, ringing harshly and strangely above the Father's accents and the solemn hush. "I protest against this service!"

A thrill of astonishment ran through the crowd, and all rose. Every man in the church turned round, Sir Anthony among the first, and looked in the direction of the voice. Then it was seen that the Clopton men had massed themselves about the door in the south-west corner—a strong position, whence retreat was easy. Father Carey, after a momentary glance, went on as if he had not heard; but his voice shook, and all still waited with their faces turned towards the west end.

"I protest in the name of the Queen!" the same man cried sharply, while his fellows raised a murmur so that the priest's voice was drowned.

Sir Anthony stepped into the aisle, his face inflamed with anger. The interruption taking place there, in that place, seemed to him a double profanation.

"Who is that brawler?" he said, his hand trembling on his staff; and all the old dames trembled too. "Let him stand out."

The sheriff's spokesman was so concealed by his fellows that he could not be seen; but he answered civilly enough.

"I am no brawler," he said. "I only require the law to be observed; and that you know, sir. I am here on behalf of the sheriff; and I warn all present that a continuation of this service will expose them to grievous pains and penalties. If you desire it, I will read the royal order, to prove that I do not speak without warrant."

"Begone, knave, you and your fellows!" Sir Anthony cried. A loyal man in all else, and the last to deny the Queen's right or title, he had no reasonable answer to give, and could only bluster. "Begone! do you hear?" he repeated; and he rapped his staff on the pavement, and then, raising it, pointed to the door.

All Coton thought the men must go; but the men, perhaps because they were Clopton, did not go. And Sir Anthony had not so completely lost his head as to proceed to extremities except in the last resort. Affecting to consider the incident at an end, he stepped back into his pew without waiting to see whether the man obeyed him or no, and resumed his devotions. Father Carey, at a nod from him, went on with the interrupted service.

But again the priest had barely read a dozen lines before the same man made the congregation start by crying loudly, "Stop!"

"Go on!" shouted Sir Anthony in a voice of thunder.

"At your peril!" retorted the intervener.

"Go on!" from Sir Anthony again.

Father Carey stood silent, trembling and looking from one to the other. Many a priest of his faith would have risen on the storm and, in the spirit of Hildebrand, hurled his Church's curse at the intruder. But the Father was not of these, and he hesitated, fumbling with his surplice with his feeble white hands. He feared as much for his patron as for himself; and it was on the knight that his eyes finally rested. But Sir Anthony's

brow was black: he got not comfort there. So the Father took courage and a long breath, opened his mouth and read on, amid a hush of suppressed excitement, and of such anger and stealthy defiance as surely English Church had never seen before. As he read, however, he gathered courage, and his voice strength. The solemn words, so ancient, so familiar, fell on the stillness of the church, and awed even the sheriff's men. To the surprise of nearly every one, there was no further interruption: the service ended quietly.

So after all Sir Anthony had his way, and stalked out, stiff and unbending. Nor was there any falling off, but rather an increase in the respect with which his people rose, according to custom, as he passed. Yet under that increase of respect lay a something, which cut the old man to the heart. He saw that his dependents pitied him while they honoured him; that they thought him a fool for running his head against a stone wall—as Martin Luther put it—even while they felt that there was something grand in it too.

During the rest of the day he went about his usual employments, but probably with little zest. He had done what he had done without any very

clear idea how he was going to proceed. Between his loyalty in all else and his treason in this, it would not have been easy for a Solomon to choose a consistent path. And Sir Anthony was no Solomon. He chose at last to carry himself as if there were no danger—as if the thing which had happened were unimportant. He ordered no change and took no precautions. He shut his ears to the whispering which went on among the servants, and his eyes to the watch which by some secret order of Baldwin was kept upon the Ridgeway.

It was something of a shock to him, therefore, when his daughter came to him after breakfast next morning, looking pale and heavy-eyed, and, breaking through the respect which had hitherto kept her silent, begged him to go away.

“To go away?” he cried. He rose from his oak chair and glared at her. Then his feelings found their easiest vent in anger. “What do you mean, girl?” he blustered. “Go away? Go where?”

But she did not quail. Indeed she had her suggestion ready.

“To the Mere Farm in the forest, sir,” she answered earnestly. “They will not look for you there; and Martin says——”

“Martin? The fool!”

His face grew redder and redder. This was too much. He loved order and discipline; and to be advised in such matters by a woman and a fool! It was intolerable!

“Go to, girl!” he cried, fuming. “I wondered where you had got your tale so pat. So you and the fool have been putting your heads together! Go! Go and spin, and leave these matters to men! Do you think that my brother, after travelling the world over, has not got a head on his shoulders? Do you think if there were danger, he and I would not have foreseen it?”

He waved his hand and turned away, expecting her to go. But Petronilla did not go. She had something else to say, and, though the task was painful, she was resolved to say it.

“Father, one word,” she murmured. “About my uncle.”

“Well, well! What about him?”

“I distrust him, sir,” she ventured, in a low tone, her colour rising. “The servants do not like him. They fear him and suspect him of I know not what.”

“The servants!” Sir Anthony answered in an awful tone.

Indeed, it was not the wisest thing she could

have said; but the consequences were averted by a sudden alarm and shouting outside. Half a dozen voices, shrill or threatening, seemed to rise at once. The knight strode to the window, but the noise appeared to come, not from the Chase upon which it looked, but from the courtyard or the rear of the house. Sir Anthony caught up his stick, and, followed by the girl, ran down the steps. He pushed aside half a dozen women who had likewise been attracted by the noise, and hastened through the narrow passage which led to the wooden bridge in the rear of the buildings.

Here, in the close on the farther side of the moat, a strange scene was passing. A dozen horsemen were grouped in the middle of the field about a couple of prisoners, while round the gate by which they had entered stood as many stout men on foot, headed by Baldwin, and armed with pikes and staves. These seemed to be taunting the cavaliers and daring them to come on. On the wooden bridge by which the knight stood were half a dozen of the servants, also armed. Sir Anthony recognised in the leading horseman Sir Philip Clopton, and in the prisoners Father Carey and one of the woodmen; and in a moment he comprehended what had happened.

The sheriff, in the most unneighbourly manner,

instead of challenging his front door, had stolen up to the rear of the house, and, without saying with your leave or by your leave, had snapped up the poor priest, who happened to be wandering in that direction. Probably he had intended to force an entrance; but he had laid aside the plan when he saw his own retreat menaced by the watchful Baldwin, who was not to be caught napping. The knight took all this in at a glance, and his gorge rose as much at the Clopton men's trick as at the danger in which Father Carey stood. So he lost his head, and made matters worse. "Who are these villains," he cried in a rage, his face aflame, "who come attacking men's houses in time of peace? Begone, or I will have at ye!"

"Sir Anthony!" Clopton cried, interrupting him, "in Heaven's name do not carry the thing farther! Give me way in the Queen's name, and I will——"

What he would do was never known, for at that last word, away at the house, behind Sir Anthony, there was a puff of smoke, and down went the sheriff headlong, horse and man, while the report of an arquebuse rang dully round the buildings. The knight gazed horrified; but the damage was done and could not be undone. Nay, more, the Coton men took the sound for a

signal. With a shout, before Sir Anthony could interfere, they made a dash for the group of horsemen. The latter, uncertain and hampered by the fall of their leader, who was not hit, but was stunned beyond giving orders, did the best they could. They let their prisoners go with a curse, and then, raising Sir Philip and forming a rough line, they charged towards the gate by which they had entered.

The footmen stood the brunt gallantly, and for a moment the sharp ringing of the quarter-staves and the shivering of steel told of as pretty a combat as ever took place on level sward in full view of an English home. The spectators could see Baldwin doing wonders. His men backed him up bravely. But in the end the impetus of the horses told, the footmen gave way and fled aside, and the strangers passed them. A little more skirmishing took place at the gateway, Sir Anthony's men being deaf to all his attempts to call them off; and then the Clopton horsemen got clear, and, shaking their fists, and vowing vengeance, rode off towards the forest. They left two of their men on the field, however, one with a broken arm and one with a shattered kneecap; while the house party, on their side, besides sundry knocks and bruises, could show one deep

sword-cut, a broken wrist, and half a dozen nasty wounds.

"My poor little girl!" Sir Anthony whispered to himself, as he gazed with scared eyes at the prostrate men and the dead horse, and comprehended what had happened. "This is a hanging business! In arms against the Queen! What am I to do?" And as he went back to the house, in a kind of stupor, he muttered again, "My little girl! my poor little girl!"

No doubt, in this terrible crisis he looked to get support and comfort from his brother—that old campaigner, who had seen so many vicissitudes and knew by heart so many shifts. But Ferdinand, though he thought the event unlucky, had little to say and less to suggest, and seemed, indeed, to have become on a sudden flaccid and lukewarm. Sir Anthony felt himself thrown on his own resources. "Who fired the shot?" he asked, looking about the room in a dazed fashion. "It was that which did the mischief," he continued, forgetting his own hasty challenge.

"I think it must have been Martin Luther," Ferdinand answered.

But Martin Luther, when he was accused, denied this stoutly. He had been so far along the Ridgeway, he said, that though he had re-

turned at once on hearing the shot fired, he had arrived too late for the fight. The fool's stomach for a fight was so well known that this seemed probable enough, and though some still suspected him, the origin of the unfortunate signal was never clearly determined, though in after days shrewd guesses were made by some.

For a few hours it seemed as if Sir Anthony had sunk into his former state of indecision. But when Petronilla came again to him soon after noon to beg him to go into hiding, she found his mood had altered. "Go to the Mere Farm?" he said, not angrily now, but firmly and quietly. "No, girl, I cannot. I have been in fault, and I must stay and pay for it. If I left these poor fellows to bear the brunt, I could never hold up my head again. But do you go now and tell Baldwin to come to me."

She went and told the stern, dour-looking steward, and he came up.

"Baldwin," said the knight when the door was shut, and the two were alone, "you are to dismiss to their homes all the tenants—who have, indeed, been called out without my orders. Bid them to go and keep the peace, and I hope they will not be molested. For you and Father Carey,

you must go into hiding. The Mere Farm will be best."

"And what of you, Sir Anthony?" the steward asked, amazed at this act of folly.

"I shall remain here," the knight replied with dignity.

"You will be taken," said Baldwin, after a pause.

"Very well," said the knight.

The man shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

"What do you mean?" asked Sir Anthony, in anger.

"Why, just that I cannot do it," Baldwin answered, glowering at him with a flush on his dark cheek. "That is what I mean. Let the priest go, if he will. I cannot go, and will not."

"Then you will be hanged!" quoth the knight warmly. "You have been in arms against the Queen, you fool! You will be hanged as sure as you stay here!"

"Then I shall be hanged," replied the steward sullenly. "There never was a Cludde hanged yet without one to keep him company. To hear of it would make my grandsire turn in his grave out there. I dare not do it, Sir Anthony, and that is the fact. But for the rest I will do as you bid me."

And he had his way. But never had evening fallen more strangely and sadly at Coton before. The rain pattered drearily in the courtyard. The drawbridge, by Baldwin's order, had been pulled up, and the planks over the moat in the rear removed.

"They shall not steal upon us again!" he muttered. "And if we must surrender, they shall see we do it willingly."

The tenants had gone to their homes and their wives. Only the servants remained. They clustered, sullen and sorrowful, about the hearth in the great hall, starting if a dog howled without or a coal flew from the fire within. Sir Anthony remained brooding in his own room, Petronilla sitting beside him silent and fearful, while Ferdinand and his wife moved restlessly about, listening to the wind. But the evening and the night wore peacefully away, and so, to the surprise of everybody, did the next day and the next. Could the sheriff be going to overlook the matter? Alas! on the fourth day the doubt was resolved. Two or three boys, who had been sent out as scouts, came in with news that there was a strong watch set on the Ridgeway, that the paths through the forest were guarded, that bodies of armed men were arriving in the neighbouring

villages, and that soldiers had been demanded—or so it was said—from Warwick and Worcester, and even from a place as far away as Oxford. Probably it was only the sheriff's prudence which had postponed the crisis; and now it had come. The net was drawn all round. As the day closed in on Coton and the sun set angrily among the forest trees, the boys' tale, which grew no doubt in the telling, passed from one to another, and men swore and looked out of window, and women wept in corners. In the Tower-room Sir Anthony sat awaiting the summons, and wondered what he could do to save his daughter from possible rudeness, or even hurt, at the hands of these strangers.

There was one man missing from hall and kitchen, but few in their own suspense noticed his absence. The fool had heard the boys' story, and, unable to remain inactive under such excitement, he presently stole off in the dusk to the rear of the house. Here he managed to cross the moat by means of a plank, which he then drew over and hid in the grass. This quietly managed—Baldwin, be it said, had strictly forbidden any one to leave the house—Martin made off with a grim chuckle towards the forest, and, following the main track leading towards Wootten

Wawen, presently came among the trees upon a couple of sentinels. They heard him, saw him indistinctly, and made a rush for him. But this was just the sport Martin liked, and the fun he had come for. His quick ear apprised him of the danger, and in a second he was lost in the underwood, his mocking laugh and shrill taunts keeping the poor men on the shudder for the next ten minutes. Then the uncanny accents died away, and, satisfied with his sport and the knowledge he had gained, the fool made for home. As he sped quickly across the last field, however, he was astonished by the sight of a dark figure in the very act of launching his—Martin's—plank across the moat.

“Ho, ho!” the fool muttered in a fierce undertone. “That is it, is it? And only one! If they will come one by one, like the plums in the kitchen porridge, I shall make a fine meal!”

He stood back, crouching down on the grass, and watched the unknown, his eyes glittering. The stranger was a tall, big fellow, a formidable antagonist. But Martin cared nothing for that. Had he not his long knife, as keen as his wits—when they were at home, which was not always. He drew it out now, and, under cover of the darkness, crept nearer and nearer, his blood glow-

ing pleasantly, though the night was cold. How lucky it was he had come out! He could hardly restrain the "Ho, ho!" which rose to his lips. He meant to leap upon the man on this side of the water, that there might be no tell-tale traces on the farther bank.

But the stranger was too quick for him in this. He got his bridge fixed, and began to cross before Martin could crawl near enough. As he crossed, however, his feet made a slight noise on the plank, and under cover of it the fool rose and ran forward, then followed him over with the stealthiness of a cat. And like a cat, too, the moment the stranger's foot touched the bank, Martin sprang on him with his knife raised—sprang on him silently, with his teeth grinning and his eyes aflame.

CHAPTER XI.

AWAITING THE BLOW.

A MOMENT later the servants in the hall heard a scream—a scream of such horror and fear that they scarcely recognised a human voice in the sound. They sprang to their feet, scared and trembling, and for a few seconds looked into one another's faces. Then, as curiosity got the upper hand, the boldest took the lead, and all hurried pell-mell to the door, issuing in a mob into the courtyard, where Ferdinand Cludde, who happened to be near and had also heard the cry, joined them. "Where was it, Baldwin?" he exclaimed.

"At the back, I think," the steward answered. He alone had had the coolness to bring out a lantern, and he now led the way towards the rear of the house. Sure enough, close to the edge of the moat, they found Martin, stooping with his hands on his knees, a great wound, half bruise, half cut, upon his forehead. "What is it?" Ferdinand cried sharply. "Who did it, man?"

Baldwin had already thrown his light on the fool's face, and the latter, seeming to become conscious of their presence, looked at them, but in a dazed fashion. "What?" he muttered; "what is what?"

By this time nearly everyone in the house had hurried to the spot; among them not only Petronilla, clinging to her father's arm, but Mistress Anne, her face pale and gloomy, and half a dozen womenfolk who clutched one another tightly, and screamed at regular intervals.

"What is it?" Baldwin repeated roughly, laying his hand on Martin's arm and slightly shaking him. "Come, who struck you, man?"

"I think," the fool answered slowly, gulping down something and turning a dull eye on the group; "a—a swallow flew by—and hit me!"

They shrank away from him instinctively, and some crossed themselves. "He is in one of his mad fits," Baldwin muttered. Still the steward showed no fear. "A swallow, man!" he cried aloud. "Come, talk sense! There are no swallows flying at this time of year. And if there were, they do not fly by night, nor give men wounds like that. What was it? Out with it now. Do you not see, man," he added, giving Martin an impatient shake, "that Sir Anthony is waiting?"

The fool nodded stupidly. "A swallow," he muttered. "Ay, 'twas a swallow, a great big swallow. I—I nearly put my foot on him."

"And he flew up and hit you in the face?" Baldwin said, with huge contempt in his tone.

Martin accepted the suggestion placidly. "Ay, 'twas so. A great big swallow, and he flew up in my face," he repeated.

Sir Anthony looked at him compassionately. "Poor fellow!" he said. "Baldwin, see to him. He has had one of his fits and hurt himself."

"I never knew him hurt *himself*," Baldwin muttered darkly.

"Let somebody see to him," the knight said, disregarding the interruption. "And now come, Petronilla. Why—where has the girl gone?"

Not far. Only round to the other side of him, that she might be a little nearer to Martin. The curiosity in the other women's faces was a small thing in comparison with the startled, earnest look in hers. She gazed at the man with eyes not of affright, but of eager, avid questioning, while through her parted lips her breath came in gasps. Her cheek was red and white by turns, and, for her heart—well, it had seemed to stand still for a moment, and now was beating like the heart of some poor captured bird held in the

hand. She did not hear her father speak to her, and he had to touch her sleeve. Then she started as though she were awakening from a dream, and followed him sadly into the house.

Sadly, and yet there was a light in her eyes which had not been there five minutes before. A swallow? A great big swallow? And this was December, when the swallows were at the bottom of the horseponds. She only knew of one swallow whose return was possible in winter. But then that one swallow—ay, though the snow should lie inches deep in the Chase, and the water should freeze in her room—would make a summer for her. Could it be that one? Could it be? Petronilla's heart was beating so loudly as she went upstairs after her father that she wondered he did not hear it.

The group left round Martin gradually melted away. Baldwin was the only man who could deal with him in his mad fits, and the other servants, with a shudder and a backward glance, gladly left him to the steward. Mistress Anne had gone in some time. Only Ferdinand Cludde remained, and he stood a little apart, and seemed more deeply engaged in listening for any sound which might betoken the sheriff's approach than in

hearkening to their conversation. Listen as he might, he would have gained little from the latter, for it was made up entirely of scolding on one side and stupid reiteration on the other. Yet Ferdinand, ever suspicious and on his guard, must have felt some interest in it, for he presently called the steward to him. "Is he more fool or knave?" he muttered, pointing under hand at Martin, who stood in the gloom a few paces away.

Baldwin shrugged his shoulders, but remained silent. "What happened? What is the meaning of it all?" Ferdinand persisted, his keen eyes on the steward's face. "Did he do it himself? Or who did it?"

Baldwin turned slowly and nodded towards the moat. "I expect you will find him who did it there," he said grimly. "I never knew a man save Sir Anthony or Master Francis hit Martin yet, but he paid for it. And when his temper is up, he is mad, or as good as mad; and better than two sane men!"

"He is a dangerous fellow," Ferdinand said thoughtfully, shivering a little. It was unlike him to shiver and shake. But the bravest have their moods.

“Dangerous?” the steward answered. “Ay, he is to some, and sometimes.”

Ferdinand Cludde looked sharply at the speaker as if he suspected him of a covert sneer. But Baldwin's gloomy face betrayed no glint of intelligence or amusement, and the knight's brother, reassured and yet uneasy, turned on his heel and went into the house, meeting at the door a servant who came to tell him that Sir Anthony was calling for him. Baldwin Moor, left alone, stood a moment thinking, and then turned to speak to Martin. But Martin was gone, and was nowhere to be seen.

The lights in the hall windows twinkled cheerily, and the great fire cast its glow half way across the courtyard, as lights and fire had twinkled and glowed at Coton End on many a night before. But neither in hall nor chamber was there any answering merriment. Baldwin, coming in, cursed the servants who were in his way, and the men moved meekly and without retort, taking his oaths for what they were—a man's tears. The women folk sat listening pale and frightened, and one or two of the grooms, those who had done least in the skirmish, had visions of a tree and a rope, and looked sickly. The

rest scowled and blinked at the fire, or kicked up a dog if it barked in its sleep.

"Hasn't Martin come in?" Baldwin growled, presently, setting his heavy wet boot on a glowing log, which hissed and sputtered under it. "Where is he?"

"Don't know!" one of the men took on himself to answer. "He did not come in here."

"I wonder what he is up to now?" Baldwin exclaimed, with gloomy irritation: for which, under the circumstances, he had ample excuse. He knew that resistance was utterly hopeless, and could only make matters worse, and twist the rope more tightly about his neck—to put the thought as he framed it. The suspicion therefore that this madman—for such in his worse fits the fool became—might be hanging round the place in dark corners, doing what deadly mischief he could to the attacking party, was not a pleasant one.

A grey-haired man in the warmest nook by the fire seemed to read his thoughts.

"There is one in the house," he said slowly and oracularly, his eyes on Baldwin's boot, "whom he has just as good a mind to hurt, has our Martin, as any of them Clopton men. Ah, that has he, Master Baldwin."

"And who is that, gaffer?" Baldwin asked contemptuously.

But the old fellow turned shy.

"Well, it is not Sir Anthony," he answered, nodding his head, and stooping forward to caress his toasting shins. "Be you very sure of that. Nor the young mistress, nor the young master as was, nor the new lady that came a month ago. No, nor it is not you, Master Baldwin."

"Then who is it?" cried the steward impatiently.

"He is shrewd, is Martin—when the saints have not got their backs to him," said the old fellow, slyly.

"Who is it?" thundered the steward, well used to this rustic method of evasion. "Answer, you dolt!"

But no answer came, and Baldwin never got one; for at this moment a man who had been watching in front of the house ran in.

"They are here!" he cried; "a good hundred of them, and torches enough for St. Anthony's Eve. Get you to the gate, porter; Sir Anthony is calling for you. Do you hear?"

There was a great uprising, a great clattering

of feet and barking of dogs, and some wailing among the women. As the messenger finished speaking, a harsh challenge which penetrated even the courtyard arose from many voices without, and was followed by the winding of a horn. This sufficed. All hurried with one accord into the court, where the porter looked to Baldwin for instructions.

"Hold a minute!" cried the steward, silencing the loudest hound by a sound kick, and disregarding Sir Anthony's voice, which came from the direction of the gateway. "Let us see if they are at the back too."

He ran through the passage, and emerging on the edge of the moat was at once saluted by a dozen voices warning him back. There were a score of dark figures standing in the little close where the fight had taken place.

"Right," said Baldwin to himself. "Needs must when the old gentleman drives! Only I thought I would make sure."

He ran back at once, nearly knocking down Martin, who with a companion was making, but at a slower pace, for the front of the house.

"Well, old comrade!" cried the steward, smiting the fool on the back as he passed, "you are

here, are you? I never thought that you and I would be in at our own deaths!"

He did not notice, in the wild humour which had seized him, who Martin's companion was, though probably at another time it would have struck him that there was no one in the house quite so tall. He sped on with scarcely a glance, and in a moment was under the gateway, where Sir Anthony was soundly rating everybody, and particularly the porter; who with his key in the door found, or affected to find, the task of turning it a difficult one. As the steward came up, however, the big doors at some sign from him creaked on their hinges, and the knight, his staff in his hand, and the servants clustering behind him with lanterns, walked forward a pace or two to the end of the bridge, bearing himself with some dignity.

"Who disturbs us at this hour?" he cried, peering across the moat, and signing to Baldwin to hold up his large lantern, since the others, uncertain of their reception, had put out their torches. By its light he and those behind him could make out a group of half a dozen figures a score of yards away, while in support of these there appeared a bow-shot off, and still in the open ground, a clump of, it might be, a hundred

men. Beyond all, lay the dark line of trees, above which the moon, now risen, was sailing through a watery wrack of clouds. "Who are ye?" the knight repeated.

"Are you Sir Anthony Cludde?" came the answer.

"I am."

"Then, in the Queen's name, Sir Anthony," the leader of the troop cried solemnly, "I call on you to surrender. I hold a warrant for your arrest, and also for the arrest of James Carey, a priest, and Baldwin Moor, who, I am told is your steward. I am backed by forces which it will be vain to resist."

"Are you Sir Philip Clopton?" the knight asked. For at that distance and in that light it was impossible to be sure.

"I am," the sheriff answered earnestly. "And, as a friend, I beg you, Sir Anthony, to avoid useless bloodshed and further cause of offence. Sir Thomas Greville, the governor of Warwick Castle, and Colonel Bridgewater are with me. I implore you, my friend, to surrender, and I will do you what good offices I may."

The knight, as we know, had made up his mind. And yet for a second he hesitated. There were stern, grim faces round him, changed by the

stress of the moment into the semblance of dark Baldwin's: the faces of men who, though they numbered but a dozen, were his men, bound to him by every tie of instinct, and breeding, and custom. And he had been a soldier, and knew the fierce joy of a desperate struggle against odds. Might it not be better after all?

But then he remembered his womenkind; and, after all, why endanger these faithful men? He raised his voice, and cried clearly—

“I accept your good offices, Sir Philip, and I take your advice. I will have the drawbridge lowered, only I beg you will keep your men well in hand, and do my poor house as little damage as may be.”

Giving Baldwin the order, and bidding him as soon as it was performed come to him, the knight walked steadily back into the courtyard and took his stand there. He despatched the women and some of the servants to lay out a meal in the hall. But it was noticeable that the men went reluctantly, and that all who could find any excuse to do so, lingered round Sir Anthony as if they could not bear to abandon him; as if, even at the last moment, they had some vague notion of protecting their master at all hazards. A score of lanterns shed a gloomy, uncertain light

—only in places reinforced by the glow from the hall windows—upon the group. Seldom had a Coton moon peeped over the gables at a scene stranger than that which met the sheriff's eyes, as with his two backers he passed under the gateway.

“I surrender to you, Sir Philip,” the knight said with dignity, stepping forward a pace or two, “and call you to witness that I might have made resistance and have not. My tenants are quiet in their homes, and only my servants are present. Father Carey is not here, nor in the house. This is Baldwin Moor, my steward; but I beg for him your especial offices, since he has done nothing save by my command.”

“Sir Anthony, believe me that I will do all I can,” the sheriff responded gravely; “but——”

“But to set at naught the Queen's proclamation and order!” struck in a third voice harshly—it was Sir Thomas Greville's—“and she but a month on the throne! For shame, Sir Anthony! It smacks to me of high treason. And many a man has suffered for less, let me tell you.”

“Had she been longer on the throne,” the sheriff put in more gently, “and were the times quiet, the matter would have been of less mo-

ment, Sir Anthony, and might not have become a State matter. But just now——”

“Things are in a perilous condition,” Greville said bluntly; “and you have done your little to make them worse!”

The knight by a great effort swallowed his rage and humiliation.

“What will you do with me, gentlemen?” he asked, speaking with at least the appearance of calmness.

“That is to be seen,” Greville said, roughly over-riding his companion. “For to-night we must make ourselves and our men comfortable here.”

“Certainly — with Sir Anthony’s leave, Sir Thomas Greville,” quoth a voice from behind. “But only so!”

More than one started violently, while the Cludde servants almost to a man spun round at the sound of the voice, which in truth was mine, Francis Cludde’s, though in the darkness no one knew me. How shall I ever forget the joy and lively gratitude which filled my heart as I spoke; which turned the night into day, and that fantastic scene of shadows into a festival, as I felt that the ambition of the last four years was about to be gratified. Sir Anthony, who was one of the first to turn, peered among the servants.

"Who spoke?" he cried, a sudden discomposure in his voice and manner. "Who spoke there?"

"Ay, Sir Anthony, who did?" Greville said haughtily. "Some one apparently who does not understand his place or the state of affairs here. Stand back, my men, and let me see him. Perhaps we may teach him a useful lesson."

The challenge was welcome, for I feared a scene, and to be left face to face with my uncle more than anything. Now, as the servants, with a loud murmur of surprise and recognition, fell back and disclosed me standing by Martin's side, I turned a little from Sir Anthony and faced Greville.

"Not this time, I think, Sir Thomas," I said, giving him back glance for glance. "I have learned my lesson from some who have fared farther and seen more than you, from men who have stood by their cause in foul weather as well as fair; and were not for mass one day and a sermon the next."

"What is this?" he cried angrily. "Who are you?"

"Sir Anthony Cludde's dutiful and loving nephew," I answered, with a courteous bow. "Come back, I thank Heaven, in time to do him a service, Sir Thomas."

"Master Francis! Master Francis!" Clopton exclaimed in remonstrance. He had known me in old days.

Meanwhile my uncle gazed at me in the utmost astonishment, and into the servants' faces there flashed a strange light, many of them hailing me in a tone which told me that I had but to give the word, and they would fall on the very sheriff himself. "Master Francis," Sir Philip Clopton repeated gravely, "if you would do your uncle a service, this is not the way to go about it. He has surrendered and is our prisoner. Brawling will not mend matters."

I laughed out loudly and merrily.

"Do you know, Sir Philip," I said, with something of the old boyish ring in my voice, "I have been, since I saw you last, to Belgium and Germany—ay, and Poland and Hamburg? Do you think I have come back a fool?"

"I do not know what to think of you," he replied drily; "but you had best——"

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, my friend!" said Greville, with harshness, "and yourself out of this business."

"It is just this business I have come to get into, Sir Thomas," I answered with increasing good humour. "Sir Anthony, show them that!" I con-

tinued, and I drew out a little packet of parchment with a great red seal hanging from it by a green ribbon; just such a packet as that which I had stolen from the Bishop's apparitor nearly four years back. "A lantern here!" I cried. "Hold it steady, Martin, that Sir Anthony may read. Master Sheriff wants his rere-supper."

I gave the packet into the knight's hand, my own shaking. Ay, shaking, for was not this the fulfilment of that boyish vow I had made in my little room in the gable yonder so many years ago? A fulfilment strange and timely, such as none but a boy in his teens could have hoped for, nor any but a man, who had tried the chances and mishaps of the world, could fully enjoy as I was enjoying it. I tingled with the rush through my veins of triumph and gratitude. Up to the last moment I had feared lest anything should go wrong, lest this crowning happiness should be withheld from me. Now I stood there smiling, watching Sir Anthony as, with trembling fingers, he fumbled with the paper. And there was only one thing, only one person, wanting to my joy. I looked, and looked again, but I could not anywhere see Petronilla.

"What is it?" Sir Anthony said feebly, turn-

ing the packet over and over. "It is for the sheriff—for the sheriff, is it not?"

"He had better open it then, sir," I answered gaily.

Sir Philip took the packet, and, after a glance at the address, tore it open.

"It is an order from Sir William Cecil," he muttered. Then he ran his eye down the brief contents, while all save myself pricked their ears and pressed closer, and I looked swiftly from face to face, as the wavering light lit up now one and now another—old familiar faces for the most part.

"Well, Sir Philip, will you stop to supper?" I cried with a laugh, when he had had time, as I judged, to reach the signature.

"Go to!" he grunted, looking at me. "Nice fools you have made of us, young man!" He passed the letter to Greville. "Sir Anthony," he continued, a mixture of pleasure and chagrin in his voice, "you are free! I congratulate you on your luck. Your nephew has brought an amnesty for all things done up to the present time save for any life taken, in which case the matter is to be referred to the Secretary. Fortunately my dead horse is the worst of the mischief, so free you are,

and amnestied, though nicely Master Cecil has befooled us!"

"We will give you another horse, Sir Philip," I answered. "And a better one."

But the words were wasted on the air. They were drowned in the shout of joy and triumph, which rang from a score of Cludde throats the moment the purport of the paper was understood: a shout which made the old house shake again, and scared the dogs so that they fled away into corners and gazed askance at us, their tails between their legs: a shout which was plainly heard a mile away in half-a-dozen homesteads where Cludde men lay gloomy in their beds.

By this time my uncle's hand was in mine. With his other he took off his hat.

"Lads!" he cried huskily, rearing his tall form in our midst; "a cheer for the Queen! God keep her safe, and long may she reign!"

This was universally regarded as the end of what they still proudly call in those parts "the Coton Insurrection!" When silence came again, every dog, even the oldest and wisest, had bayed himself hoarse, and fled to kennel, thinking the end of the world was come. My heart, as I joined roundly in, swelled high with pride, and there were tears in my eyes as well as in my uncle's.

But there is no triumph after all without its drawback, no fruition equal to the anticipation. Where was Petronilla? I could see her nowhere. I looked from window to window, but she was at none. I scanned the knot of maids, but could not find her. Even the cheering had not brought her out.

It was wonderful, though, how the cheers cleared the air. Even Sir Thomas Greville regained good humour, and deigned to shake me by the hand and express himself pleased that the matter had ended so happily. Presently the sheriff drew him and Bridgewater away, to look to their men's arrangements; seeing, I think, that my uncle and I would fain be alone awhile; and at last I asked in a trembling voice after Petronilla.

"To be sure," Sir Anthony answered, furtively wiping his eyes. "I had forgotten her, dear lad. I wish now that she had stayed. But tell me, Francis, how came you back to-night, and how did you manage this?"

Something of what he asked I told him hurriedly. And then—be sure I took advantage of the first opening—I asked again after Petronilla.

"Where has she gone, sir?" I said, trying to conceal my impatience. "I thought that Martin

told me she was here; indeed, that he had seen her after I arrived."

"I am not sure, do you know," Sir Anthony answered, eyeing me absently, "that I was wise, but I considered she was safer away, Francis. And she can be fetched back in the morning. I feared there might be some disturbance in the house—as indeed there well might have been—and though she begged very hard to stay with me, I sent her off."

"This evening, sir?" I stammered, suddenly chilled.

"Yes, an hour ago."

"But an hour ago every approach was guarded, Sir Anthony," I cried in surprise. "I had the greatest difficulty in slipping through from the outside myself, well as I know every field and tree. To escape from within, even for a man, much less a woman, would have been impossible. She will have been stopped."

"I think not," he said, with a smile at once sage and indulgent—which seemed to add, "You think yourself a clever lad, but you do not know everything yet."

"I sent her out by the secret passage to the mill house, you see," he explained, "as soon as I

heard the sheriff's party outside. I could have given them the slip myself had I pleased."

"The mill house?" I answered. The mill stood nearly a quarter of a mile from Coton End, beyond the gardens, and in the direction of the village. I remembered vaguely that I had heard from the servants in old days some talk of a secret outlet leading from the house to it. But they knew no particulars, and its existence was only darkly rumoured among them.

"You did not know of the passage," Sir Anthony said, chuckling at my astonishment. "No, I remember. But the girl did. Your father and his wife went with her. He quite agreed in the wisdom of sending her away, and indeed advised it. On reaching the mill, if they found all quiet they were to walk across to Watney's farm. There they could get horses, and might ride at their leisure to Stratford and wait the event. I thought it best for her; and Ferdinand agreed."

"And my father—went with her?" I muttered hoarsely, feeling myself growing chill to the heart. Hardly could I restrain my indignation at Sir Anthony's folly, or my own anger and disappointment. And fear. For though my head seemed on fire and there was a tumult in my brain, I was cool enough to trace clearly my father's motives,

and discern with what a deliberate purpose he had acted. "He went with her?"

"Yes, he and his wife," the knight answered, noticing nothing in his obtuseness.

"You have been fooled, sir," I said bitterly. "My father you should have known; and for his wife, she is a bad, unscrupulous woman! Oh, the madness of it to put my cousin into their hands!"

"What do you mean?" the knight cried, beginning to tremble. "Your father is a changed man, lad. He has come back to the old faith, and in a dark hour too. He——"

"He is a hypocrite and a villain!" I retorted, stung almost to madness by this wound in my tenderest place—stung, indeed, beyond endurance. Why should I spare him, when to spare him was to sacrifice the innocent? Why should I pick my words when my love was in danger? He had had no mercy and no pity. Why should I shrink from exposing him? Heaven had dealt with him patiently and given him life; and he did but abuse it. I could keep silence no longer, and told Sir Anthony all, with a stinging tongue and in gibing words: even, at last, how my father had given me a hint of the very plan he had now carried out—of coming down to Coton, and

goaded his brother into some offence which might leave his estate at the mercy of the authorities.

"I did not think he meant it," I said bitterly. "But I might have known that the leopard does not change its spots. How you, who knew him years ago, and knew that he had plotted against you since, came to trust him again—to trust your daughter to him—passes my fancy!"

"He was my brother," the knight murmured, leaning pale and panic-stricken on my shoulder.

"And my father—Heaven help us!" I rejoined.

CHAPTER XII.

PETRONILLA'S RETREAT.

"WE must first help ourselves," Sir Anthony answered sharply; rousing himself with wonderful energy from the prostration into which my story had thrown him. "I will send after her. She shall be brought back. Ho! Baldwin! Martin!" he cried loudly. "Send Baldwin hither! Be quick there!"

Out of the ruck of servants in and about the hall, Baldwin came rushing presently, wiping his lips as he approached. A single glance at our faces sobered him. "Send Martin down to the mill!" Sir Anthony ordered curtly. "Bid him tell my daughter, if she be there, to come back. And do you saddle a couple of horses, and be ready to ride with Master Francis to Watney's farm, and on to Stratford, if it be necessary. Lose not a

minute; my daughter is with Master Ferdinand. My order is that she return."

The fool had come up only a pace or two behind the steward. "Do you hear, Martin?" I added eagerly, turning to him. My thoughts, busy with the misery which might befall her in their hands, maddened me. "You will bring her back if you find her, mind you."

He did not answer, but his eyes glittered as they met mine, and I knew that he understood. As he flitted silently across the court and disappeared under the gateway, I knew that no hound could be more sure; I knew that he would not leave the trail until he had found Petronilla, though he had to follow her for many a mile. We might have to pursue the fugitives to Stratford, but I felt sure that Martin's lean figure and keen dark face would be there to meet us.

Us? No. Sir Anthony indeed said to me, "You will go, of course?" speaking as if only one answer were possible. But I thought otherwise.

"No," I said; "you had better go, sir. Or

Baldwin can be trusted. He can take two or three of the grooms. They should be armed," I added in a lower tone.

My uncle looked hard at me, and then gave his assent, no longer wondering why I did not go. Instead, he bade Baldwin do as I had suggested. My heart in truth was so hot with wrath and indignation that I dared not follow, lest my father, in his stern, mocking way, should refuse to let her go, and harm should happen between us. If I were right in my suspicions, and he had capped his intrigue by deliberately getting the girl I loved into his hands as a hostage, either as a surety that I would share with him if I succeeded to the estates, or as a means of extorting money from his brother, then I dared not trust myself face to face with him. If I could have mounted and ridden after my love, I could have borne it better. But the curse seemed to cling to me still. My worst foe was one against whom I could not lift my hand.

"Still I do not see what he can do," my uncle said, his voice quavering, though his words seemed intended to combat my fears. "What can he do, lad? She is his niece."

"What?" I answered with a shudder. "I do not know, but I fear everything. If he should elude us and take her abroad with him—Heaven help her, sir! He will use her somehow to gain his ends—or kill her."

Sir Anthony wiped his brow with a trembling hand. "Baldwin will overtake them," he said.

"Let us hope so," I answered. Alas, how far fruition fell short of anticipation. This was my time of triumph! "You had better go in, sir," I said presently, gaining a little mastery over myself. "I see Sir Philip has returned from settling his men for the night. He and Greville will be wondering what has happened."

"And you?" he said.

"I cannot," I answered, shaking my head.

After he had gone I stood awhile in the shadow on the far side of the court, listening to the clatter of knives and dishes, the cheerful hum of the servants as they called to one another, the hurrying footsteps of the maids. A dog crept out and licked my hand as it hung nerveless by my side. Surely Martin or Baldwin would over-

take them. Or if not, it still was not so easy to take a girl abroad against her will.

But would that be his plan? He must have hiding-places in England to which he might take her, telling her any wild story of her father's death or flight, or even perhaps of her own danger if her whereabouts were known. I had had experience of his daring, his cunning, his plausibility. Had he not taken in all with whom he had come into contact, except, by some strange fate, myself? To be sure, Anne was not altogether without feeling or conscience. But she was his — his entirely, body and soul. Yes, if I could have followed, I could have borne it better. It was this dreadful inaction which was killing me.

The bustle and voices of the servants, who were in high spirits, so irritated me at last that I wandered away, going first to the dark silent gardens, where I walked up and down in a fever of doubt and fear; much as I had done on the last evening I had spent at Coton. Then a fancy seized me and turning from the fish-pond I walked towards the house. Crossing the moat I made

for the church-door and tried it. It was unlocked. I went in. Here at least in the sacred place I should find quietness, and, unable to help myself in this terrible crisis, might get help from One to whom my extremity was but an opportunity.

I walked up the aisle, and finding all in darkness, the moon at the moment being obscured, felt my way as far as Sir Piers's flat monument, and sat down upon it, full of thought. I had been there scarcely a minute, however, when a faint sound, which seemed rather a sigh or an audible shudder than any articulate word, came out of the darkness in front of me. My great trouble had seemed to make superstitious fears for the time impossible; but at this sound I started and trembled, and, holding my breath, felt a cold shiver run down my back. Motionless I peered before me, and yet could see nothing. All was gloom, the only visible feature being the east window.

What was that? A soft rustle as of ghostly garments moving in the aisle was succeeded by another sigh which made me rise from my seat,

my hair stiffening. Then I saw the outline of the east window growing brighter and brighter, and I knew that the moon was about to shine clear of the clouds, and longed to turn and fly, yet did not dare to move.

Suddenly, at the last, the light fell on the altar steps, and disclosed a kneeling form which seemed to be partly turned towards me as though watching me. The face I could not see—it was in shadow—and I stood transfixed, gazing at the figure, half in superstitious terror and half in wonder; until a voice I had not heard for years, and yet should have known among a thousand, said softly, “Francis!”

“Who calls me?” I muttered hoarsely, knowing and yet disbelieving—hoping, and yet with a terrible fear at heart.

“It is I—Petronilla!” said the same voice gently. And then the form rose and glided towards me through the moonlight. “It is I—Petronilla! Do you not know me?” said my love again: and fell upon my breast.

She had been firmly resolved all the time not to quit her father, and on the first opportunity had given the slip to her company, while the horses were being saddled at Watney's farm. Stealing back through the darkness she had found the house full of uproar and apparently occupied by strange troopers. Aghast, and not knowing what to do, she had bethought herself of the church and there taken refuge. On my first entrance she was horribly alarmed. But as I walked up the aisle, she recognised—so she has since told me a thousand times with pride—my footstep, though it had long been a stranger to her ear, and she had no thought at the moment of seeing me, or hearing the joyful news I brought.

And so my story is told. For what passed then between Petronilla and me lies between my wife and myself. And it is an old, old story, and one which our children have no need to learn, for they have told it, many of them for themselves, and their children are growing up to tell it. I think, in some odd corner of the house, there may still be found a very ancient swallow's nest, which young girls bring out and look at

tenderly; but for my sword-knot I fear it has been worn out these thirty years. What matter, even though it was velvet of Genoa? He that has the substance lacks not the shadow.

I never saw my father again, nor learned accurately what passed at Watney's farm after Petronilla was missed by her two companions. But one man, whom I could ill spare, was also missing on that night, and his fate is still something of a mystery. This was Martin Luther. I have always believed that he fell in a desperate encounter with my father, but no traces of the struggle were ever found. The track between Watney's farm and Stratford, however, runs for a certain distance by the river side; and at some point on this road I think Martin must have come up with the refugees, and failing either to find Petronilla with them, or to get any satisfactory account of her, must have flung himself on my father and been foiled and killed. The exact truth, I have said, was never known, though Baldwin and I talked over it again and again; and there were even some who said that a servant much resembling Martin Luther was seen with my father in the Low Countries not a month before

his death. I put no credence in this, however, having good reason to think that the poor fool—who was wiser in his sane moments than most men—would never have left my service while the breath remained in his body.

My father was killed in a skirmish in the Netherlands shortly before the peace of Château Cambrésis, and about three months after the events here related. I have no doubt that he died as he had lived, without fear of man or God. He held no communication with me or with any at Coton End later than that which I have here described; but would appear to have entered the service of Cardinal Granvelle, the governor of the Netherlands, for after his death word came to the Duchess of Suffolk that Mistress Anne Cludde had entered a nunnery at Bruges under the Cardinal's auspices. Doubtless she is long since dead.

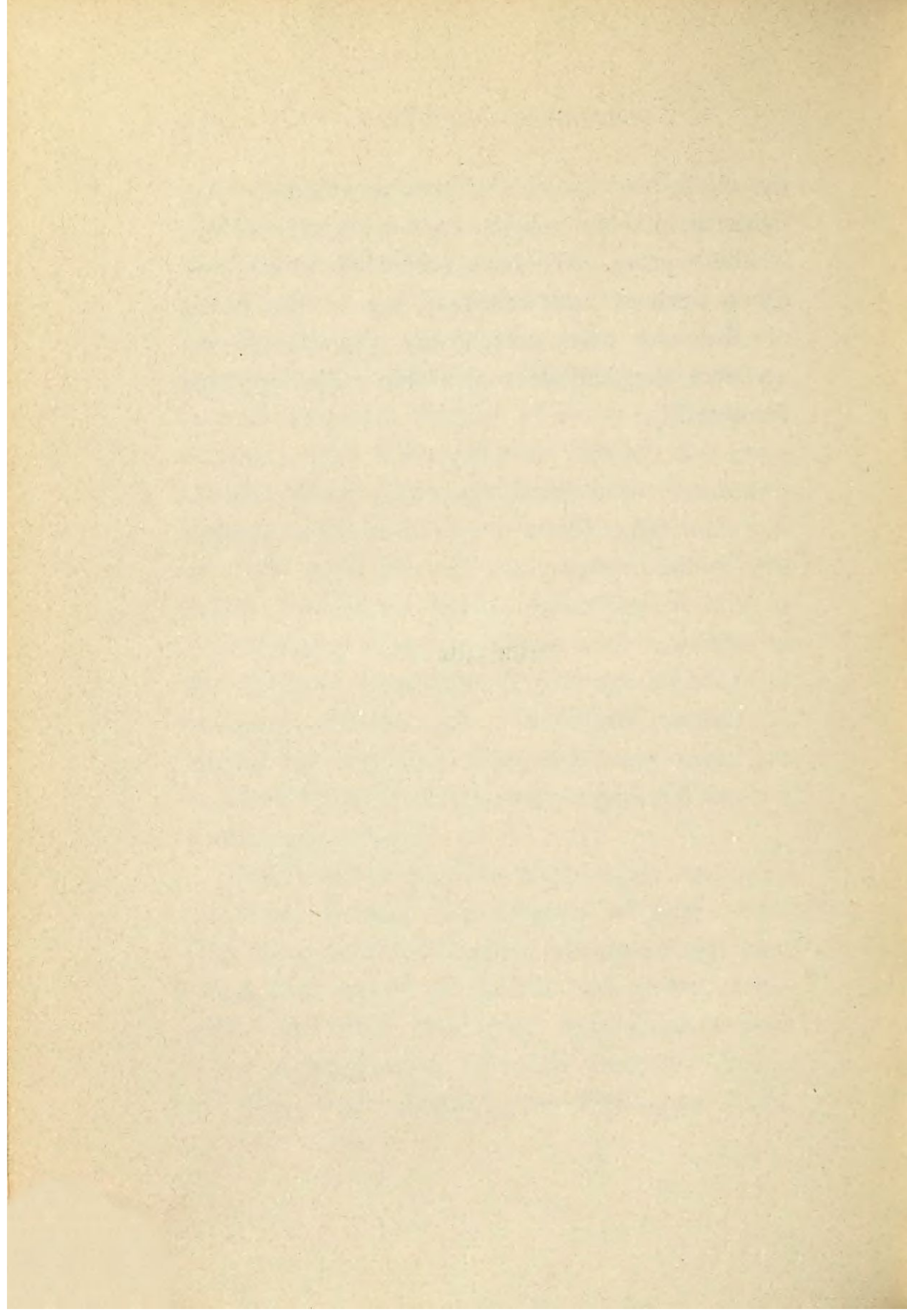
And so are many others of whom I have spoken—Sir Anthony, the Duchess, Master Bertie, and Master Lindstrom. For forty years have passed since these things happened—years of peaceful, happy life, which have gone by more swiftly, as it seems to me in the retrospect, than the four years of my wanderings. The Lind-

stroms sought refuge in England in the second year of the Queen, and settled in Lowestoft under the Duchess of Suffolk's protection, and did well and flourished as became them; nor indeed did they find, I trust, others ungrateful, though I experienced some difficulty in inducing Sir Anthony to treat the Dutch burgher as on an equality with himself. Lord Willoughby de Eresby, the Peregrine to whom I stood godfather in St. Willibrod's Church at Wesel, is now a middle-aged man and my very good friend, the affection which his mother felt for me having descended to him in full measure. She was indeed such a woman as Her Majesty; large-hearted and free-tongued, of masculine courage and a wonderful tenderness. And of her husband, what can I say save that he was a brave Christian, and in peaceful times a studious gentleman?

But it is not only in vacant seats and grey hairs that I trace the progress of forty years. They have done for England almost all that men hoped they might do in the first dawn of the reign. We have seen great foes defeated and strong friends gained. We have seen the coinage amended, trade doubled, the Exchequer filled,

the roads made good, the poor provided for in a Christian manner, religion spread abroad; all this in these years. We have seen Holland rise and Spain decline, and well may say in the words of the old text, which my grandfather set up over the hall door at Coton "*Frustra, nisi Dominus.*"

THE END.



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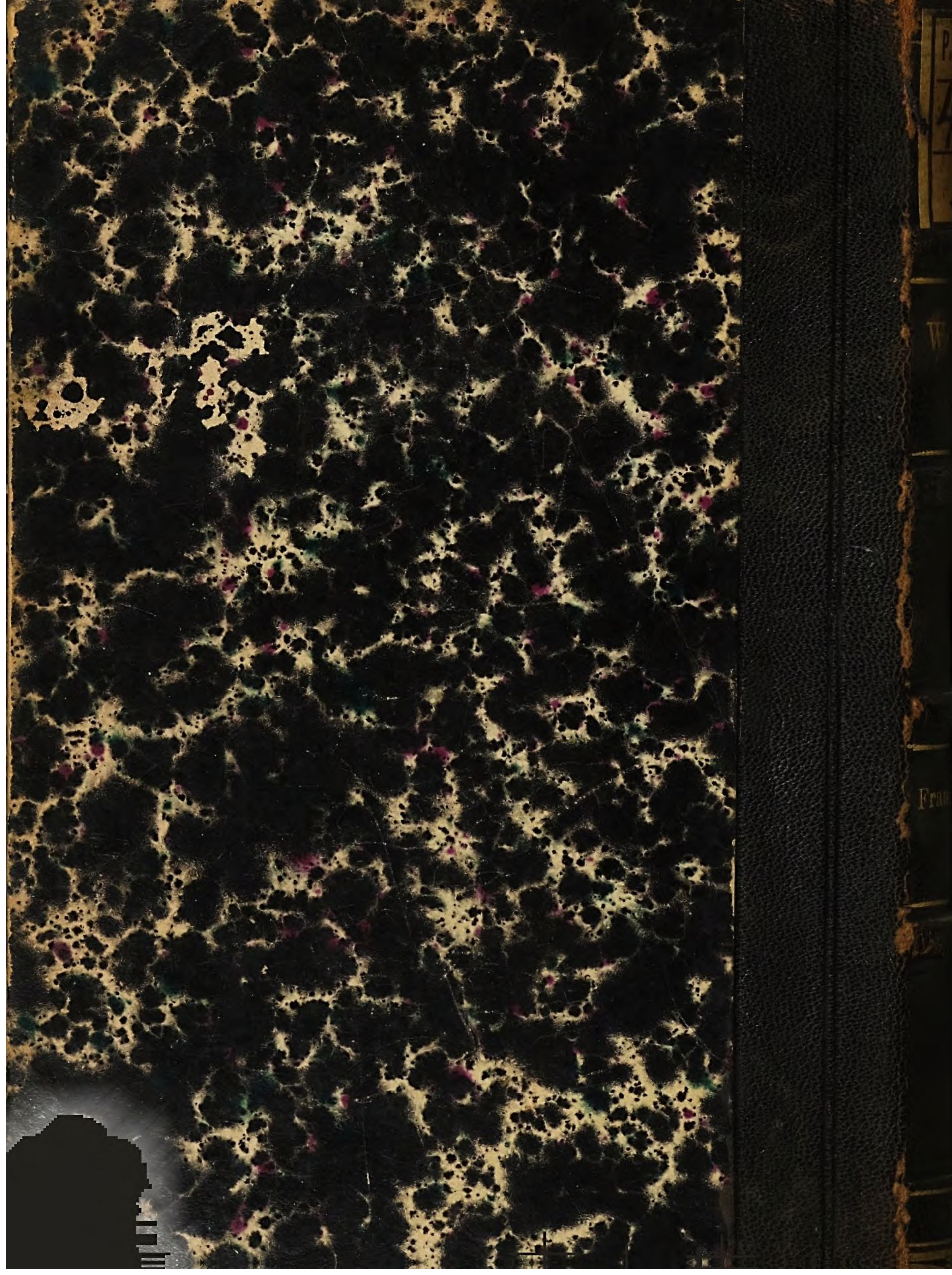
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